National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

NOTICE

The quality of this microform is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Reproduction in full or in part of this microform is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30, and subsequent amendments.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microforme dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

La reproduction, même partielle, de cette microforme est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30, et ses amendements subséquents.

Canada

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE AESTHETIC OF SOJOURNING: ANNIE DILLARD'S *TEACHING A STONE TO TALK* AND *THE LIVING*

by

©

CAM D. BALZER

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
EDMONTON, Alberta

Fall 1993

National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services Branch

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Direction des acquisitions et
des services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1A 0N4

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted an irrevocable non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of his/her thesis by any means and in any form or format, making this thesis available to interested persons.

L'auteur a accordé une licence irrévocable et non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de sa thèse de quelque manière et sous quelque forme que ce soit pour mettre des exemplaires de cette thèse à la disposition des personnes intéressées.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in his/her thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without his/her permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège sa thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

ISBN 0-315-88367-7

Canada

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

Name of Author: CAM D. BALZER

Title of Thesis: THE AESTHETIC OF SOJOURNING: ANNIE DILLARD'S *TEACHING A STONE TO TALK* AND *THE LIVING*

Degree: MASTER OF ARTS

Year this Degree Granted: 1993

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

Cam Balzer

Cam D. Balzer

#1511, 10883 Saskatchewan Drive
EDMONTON, Alberta
T6E 4S6

Fall 1993

The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. This morning, for example, I felt as if I had come to myself on a strange island. And what does such a castaway do? Why, he pokes around the neighborhood and doesn't miss a trick. To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair.

Walker Percy *The Moviegoer*

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Reseach for acceptance, a thesis entitled

The Aesthetic of Sojourning: Annie Dillard's
Teaching a Stone to Talk* and *The Living

submitted by CAM D. BALZER in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS.

C J Bullock

Dr. C. Bullock

Dr. G. Hollingshead

Landy

Dr. F. Landy

Joseph Buijs

Dr. J. Buijs

10 June 1993

Abstract

The image of sojourning is a central motif in Annie Dillard's texts to date. This notion encompasses both Dillard's interest in "the conditions" (those aspects of his world which make man feel like a sojourner) and man's journey toward meaning. Sojourning captures the idea that man feels himself a vagrant in a life he cannot understand, that he cannot know whether the order he craves and sometimes finds actually inheres in the world. Dillard's aesthetic suggests that this homelessness might be turned into the possibility for meaning: art is perhaps the most significant method of ordering his reality available to man. Man turns drift into dance with art. In the introductory chapter I will establish the significance of sojourning as a concept in Dillard's texts and introduce Dillard's aesthetic, primarily drawing upon her book of literary criticism, *Living by Fiction*.

I will then examine two of Dillard's recent texts, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* and *The Living*, in light of the aesthetic of sojourning. The second chapter will examine *Teaching* as Dillard's exploration and implementation of this aesthetic in nonfiction. In *Teaching* Dillard attempts to create in her reader an awareness of the conditions. I will focus on the way that Dillard encourages the reader to see beyond the expected. "An Expedition to the Pole," for example, uses a nonfictional magic realism to convince the reader that the material and the spiritual are equally valid realities.

In the third chapter I will explore the aesthetic of sojourning in Dillard's first novel, *The Living*. In this novel, Dillard presents her characters as sojourners on the pilgrimage toward meaning. The responses of the novel's characters to the conditions of life in the novel's fictional world can be understood in terms of a three part phenomenology of spirit: the novel's main character passes through the life of sensation and the life of the mind before achieving in the life of the spirit a "rough merger of the complex products of thought with the simple and received sensations of life in time."[1] Dillard draws the reader into a perception of reality similar to Clare's by creating a narrator who views the fictional world from the perspective of the life of the spirit. This technique produces the enigmatic tone which has led to the divergent critical responses the novel has received.

---

[1] Dillard, in an interview with Hammond (*Bennington Review* 10 [April 1981]: 38).

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Professors Bullock and Hollingshead for guiding this project, for careful readings of drafts and for advice along the way. Thanks to the Province of Alberta and the Department of English for financial support over the last two years.

Thanks to my parents, Rudy and Arlene, for supporting my venture into graduate studies during a trying period in their sojourn.

Thanks to Cam and Maxine for their encouragement and to Maxine, for introducing me to Dillard's work and for blazing a trail through graduate school.

Thanks to Heather, my companion on the sojourn and my model of excellence, who kept me moving toward the end of this project and without whose encouragement and advice I would still be wandering.

Table of Contents

Chapter One. Turning Drift to Dance: Annie Dillard's Aesthetic of Sojourning.............1

- Drifting: Sojourning.............1
- Dancing: Aesthetics.............14

Chapter Two. Unexpecting the Expected: Awareness of "The Conditions".............23

- Judging an Essay by its Package: "Jungle Peace" versus "In the Jungle".............25
- Challenging Generic Expectations: "On a Hill Far Away".............29
- Juxtaposing Realities: The Magic Realist Essay.............35
    - "Lenses".............37
    - "God in the Doorway".............39
    - "An Expedition to the Pole".............41

Chapter Three. The Life of the Spirit: Sojourning in *The Living*............. 60

- Atmospheric Pressure: Vivifying Death.............61
- Responding to the Conditions: Senses, Mind, Spirit.............77
- Narrating Sojourning.............94

Conclusion. Singing Round the Fire.............102

Notes.............105

Works Cited.............117

Appendix: Outline for "The Living".............124

CHAPTER ONE

Turning Drift to Dance: Annie Dillard's Aesthetic of Sojourning

Annie Dillard's preoccupation is the conditions of human existence and the possibilities for meaning created by those conditions. In a 1981 interview, she alludes to this theme when she lists the questions that have interested her over the course of her career:

> The question was at first, "Where are we?" "What is it like here?" The question is becoming more, "What is the human experience?"… What are we doing here? Not, How did we get here but, What is it that we all are doing? What is human culture, what is Western Culture? (Hammond 33)

Her work, then, has two main emphases: gaining an awareness of the conditions—Where are we?—and making sense of or making sense within those conditions—What are we all doing? I will argue in this thesis that the answer Dillard develops to these questions is that we are sojourners: we find ourselves "here," and here for only a brief time; we seek to understand this condition, to make our existence "here" meaningful. The ways in which man becomes aware of himself as sojourner and the ways in which he tries to make his life a meaningful journey are Dillard's constant topic. Her ongoing sermon is that we are sojourners. Her text, 1 Chronicles 29:15: "For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding" (KJV).[1] Her conclusion, meaning is a possibility.

Drifting: Sojourning

The OED gives only one current definition for the verb "sojourn": "To make a temporary stay in a place; to remain or reside for a time."[2] The word is much richer connotatively, especially for readers of the Old Testament like Annie Dillard, who might associate it with the various travels and travails of God's people from Adam to Abraham to Moses to the diaspora.[3] Dillard lists some of the resonances of the Old Testament use of the word: "it invokes a nomadic people's sense of vagrancy, a praying people's knowledge of estrangement, a thinking people's intuition of sharp loss" (*Teaching a Stone to Talk* 150).[4]

In his discussion of the dialectical relationship between Hegel and Kierkegaard, *Journeys to Selfhood*, Mark C. Taylor suggests that the roots of the notion of man as a sojourner on a spiritual quest can be traced to the first page of Augustine's *Confessions*:

> 'Our hearts, O Lord ... are restless till they find their rest in Thee.' From the time of Augustine's account of human existence as a pilgrimage from sin to salvation, from the city of man to the city of God, Christians have imagined their lives to be a journey and have viewed themselves as sojourners.... From this perspective Christ is envisioned as the way and life as wayfaring. (5)

The Christian conception of sojourning gives life coherence, so that "experience need not be a chaotic succession of unintelligible occurrences, but can be informed, ordered, patterned, plotted" (6). This notion of sojourning has shaped Western man's pilgrimage until recently.

As Christianity has lost its cultural centrality, however, alienation has replaced order as the sojourner's dominant sense *en route*: "left to wander aimlessly, [he is] stricken with a sense of homelessness and can confess little more than *dubito ergo sum*" (6–7). Though the path of life continues to be conceived ideally as "a journey whose way leads from sickness to health, *salus*, salvation" (8), the terms in which the sojourn is understood have changed from Christian *imitatio* to "the existential quest for authenticity; the Marxist pursuit of social revolution; the psychoanalytic search for a therapeutic method" (7–8).

Taylor himself describes the "journey"—no longer *to* anything—in contemporary terms in his *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, particularly in the first section of Chapter

Seven, "Erring: Serpentine Wandering." The sojourn is no longer "the temporary roaming of estranged exiles," a "detour between presences" (156, 153). With the loss of a *telos* in the era after the "death of God" and the corresponding loss of center and whole formerly provided by traditional theological formulations, the sojourner becomes a saunterer, with the sense of casualness that word suggests: "Never able to identify beginning, middle, or end, the wanderer is not sure where he comes from, where he is, or where he is going. The impossibility of locating an unambiguous center leaves the wanderer rootless and homeless; he is forever *sans terre*.... In contrast to the anxious searching of the unhappy exile, the careless wanderer '*determines the noncenter otherwise than as the loss of center*'" (156–57, quoting Derrida's *Writing and Difference*). Sojourning, painfully but with hope, for a while between time's beginning and end in eternity has been replaced by wandering, forever in the midst, with no orienting beginning or end, with hope replaced by brave—or brazen—*amor fati*.[5]

Dillard seems to develop a view of man as this type of wanderer in many of her texts. Although she apparently believes that man's wandering on this earth is bracketed by a divine realm which provides a *telos*, she also seems committed to developing a picture of the realm in which man finds himself, the realm which Taylor describes in postmodern terms, in which we waken and find ourselves sojourning. She takes man where she finds him—where she finds herself—in a puzzling, harsh world, in the silent lee of God's significant absence. In Dillard's view, man must become aware of the nature of his existence in time and space if he wishes to understand or even attempt to understand his life. This awareness suggests to man that he is a sojourner. In order to know where we are, we must wake to the conditions.

Dillard's interest in consciousness and the process of waking to consciousness has gained more critical attention than any other aspect of her work. One group of critics take their cue from what must be Dillard's most quoted comment from outside her texts: "Art is my interest, mysticism my message, Christian mysticism" (qtd. in Wymard 496).[6] Dunn, Keller, Messer and Peterson all read her as a Christian mystic attempting to communicate her visionary moments of clear sight and keen awareness. This group sees Dillard as concerned with the processes of spiritual awareness. Two other critics discuss Dillard as a kind of literary mystic: Lavery describes her "visionary naturalism" (270) and Sandra Humble Johnson places her in the tradition of literary epiphanists. Another group of critics compares Dillard with Thoreau.[7] Though they usually note the similarities and differences in the two styles and messages, these critics generally comment on Dillard and Thoreau's shared emphasis on awakening and on prophetically proclaiming the need for waking, which harks back to the epigraph to *Walden*, where Thoreau proposes to "brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning … if only to wake my neighbours up." Anhorn, Becker, McConahay and McIlroy (in four articles) all see Dillard in a Thoreauvian light, as emphasizing awareness of the natural world and of society. Slovic, in his chapter "Sudden Feelings: Annie Dillard's Psychology," offers the most recent and thorough reading of Dillard's interest in awakening. He argues that Dillard's focus is neither religious nor "environmental" awareness, but rather that she is "a devoted student of the human mind, of its processes of awakening.… In this way she is … an investigator of … the varieties of natural experience," seeking in particular "awareness of the phenomenon of awareness" (9, 65).

Each of these aspects of Dillard's treatment of waking can be subsumed under the concept of sojourning in her work. Her comment on the Old Testament connotations of the word (quoted above, p. 2) indicates that in her view sojourning involves an awareness—a "sense," "knowledge" and "intuition"— of one's surroundings and awareness of those surroundings on several levels: "vagrancy" and "nomadic" suggest a physical sojourn; "praying" and "estrangement" point to spiritual sojourning; "thinking" indicates an intellectual awareness of the conditions (*TST* 150). Dillard sees man as a sojourner on all these levels. My approach in this thesis emphasizes what it is Dillard believes man wakes to and the effect of that waking on his sense of his relationship with the surroundings in which he finds himself. Throughout this thesis, I refer to "the conditions," by which I mean those aspects—physical, mental, spiritual, social—of man's existence which, once he has awakened to them, make him feel like a sojourner, like a vagrant, an exile, a temporary visitor.[8] To reduce the conditions and the milieu of conscious awareness to only one of the aspects of human existence or to the process of awareness itself is a failure in the analyzing of Dillard's texts on the same order as the lack of perception she is writing against: it is a failure of vision in its several senses: seeing or physical perception, discerning or mental perception, and mystical or spiritual awareness. Man is a sojourner because on all levels of his existence he feels in-betweenness and temporariness. It is to this multi-dimensional sojourn that Dillard directs her analytic and artistic efforts.

A brief sketch of Dillard's understanding of waking will ground the notion of sojourning, the perception resulting from waking. Though waking is a central notion in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, An American Childhood* is Dillard's most extended discussion of waking in particular. There Dillard recounts her memories of her waking from a child's innocent obliviousness to more conscious interaction with the world. She describes this feeling of waking as follows:

> Children ten years old wake up and find themselves here, discover themselves to have been here all along; is this sad? They wake like sleepwalkers, in full stride; they wake like people brought back from cardiac arrest or from drowning: *in medias res*, surrounded by familiar people and objects, equipped with a hundred skills. They know the neighborhood, they can read and write English, they are old hands at the commonplace mysteries, and yet they feel themselves to have just stepped off the boat, just converged with their bodies, just flown down from a trance, to lodge in an eerily familiar life already well under way. (*AC* 11)

This childhood waking is preliminary to any adult waking. In the essay "Total Eclipse," Dillard suggests that human society perpetuates itself by teaching this waking to its children: "We teach our children one thing only, as we were taught: to wake up. We teach our children to look alive there, to join by words and activities the life of human culture on the planet's crust" (*TST* 97).

Adults also experience these moments of waking. McFadden-Gerber distinguishes two types of waking in *American Childhood*. First, there is the "coming to conscious awareness" described in the quotation above. Second, there are the "periodic ecstasies of transcending self and losing consciousness in the glory of experience"; the ecstasy of this second kind of awakening McFadden-Gerber attributes to the excitement of "gaining consciousness after having lost it" (26). Unable to remember to stay awake once they have awoken from their childish naïveté, adults continually reawaken to their lives in the world.[9] "As adults we are almost all adept at waking up. We have so mastered the transition we have forgotten we ever learned it. Yet it is a transition we make a hundred times a day, as, like so many will-less dolphins, we plunge and surface, lapse and emerge" (97).[10] Toward the end of *American Childhood*, Dillard describes "coming awake" as "the moment of opening a life and feeling it touch—with an electric hiss and cry—this speckled mineral sphere, our present world" (*AC* 248).

While waking seems to be a natural part of growing from childhood to maturity, man seems to need a jolt every now and then to reintroduce him to realities he knows and has felt but has also forgotten and neglected. And if one has become aware enough to notice nature, one might notice its odd hardness and our puzzling place in it. Just taking a good long look at nature can induce this sense of vagrancy and estrangement. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* is just such a sustained attempt to see the nature of the natural world. Maddocks says of the world of *Pilgrim*, that it "is not only a habitat of cruelty … but the savage and magnificent world of the Old Testament, presided over by a passionate

Jehovah with no Messiah in sight" (78). When Dillard notices, for instance, the obscene fecundity which nature employs to propagate its manifold species and the resulting holocaust—"The faster death goes, the faster evolution goes," making death "the monster that evolution loves"—she feels like a sojourner: "We the living are survivors huddled on flotsam, living on jetsam. We are escapees" (*PTC* 175). She establishes early in *Pilgrim* the idea that man wakes to himself as sojourner when he encounters nature, stating on the second page, "We wake, if we wake at all, to mystery, rumors of death, beauty, and violence. . . . 'Seem like we're just set down here,' a woman said to me recently, 'and don't nobody know why'" (*PTC* 2).

It is when we notice the planet's harshness that our perception of the natural world is altered from "the planet as home—dear and familiar stone hearth and garden" to "a hard land of exile in which we are all sojourners" (*TST* 150):

> It doesn't seem to be here that we belong, here where space is curved, the earth is round, we're all going to die, and it seems as wise to stay in bed as budge. It is strange here, not quite warm enough, or too warm, too leafy, or inedible, or windy, or dead. It is not, frankly, the sort of home for people one would have thought of—although I lack the fancy to imagine another.... [N]ature is hostile and poisonous, as though it were impossible for our vulnerability to survive on these acrid stones. (151—52)

"The material world requires and inspires our active resistance. It is a January hard frost, a river current which bears us away from our goals" (Foreword xvi).

Her most straightforward statement of her perception of the conditions of human life, of man as a sojourner, is found in a brief essay called, appropriately, "Sojourner."[11] The essay is structured as an analogy between man's place in his world and the similar relationship of mangrove trees to their environment, salt marshes and the open sea. Mangroves are able to grow from seedlings afloat in brine, their leaves exuding the poisonous salt. A growing tree's roots gather debris which becomes the soil that fosters and sustains future generations, until eventually a sizable island of trees is formed. These unusual trees "can and do exist as floating islands, as trees upright and loose, alive and homeless on the water" (148). They are, then, drifters and "the alien ocean" is their welter. As survivors in such an unlikely state of existence, they serve Dillard as a symbol for man as sojourner.

The harsh realities of the natural world confront man in his experience of suffering and death. In the original version of "Sojourners," Dillard noted that "Universal mortality can make one's direction a folly, just as it seems to the despairing that the planet's rondure renders geographic direction absurd" ("Artists of the Beautiful" 63). Her attention to these subjects is sustained enough for Smith to consider two of Dillard's three major concerns the nature of suffering and death, and "how we should live our lives in the face of the certainty of suffering and death" (125–26). *Holy the Firm* stands as Dillard's attempt to reconcile suffering—specifically, of a little girl whose face is burnt in a plane crash—with the belief that God is somehow in touch with material reality.[12] In the essay "A Deer at Providencia," Dillard's pondering of human and animal suffering makes her ask if anyone (or Anyone) knows what is going on, and whether they (He) will please explain what suffering means. The brevity and pain of human life make her feel like a spiritual sojourner, loose under the heavens.

Even a simple change of scenery can produce an epiphanic awareness of self and the conditions. In traveling, for instance, one can find oneself awake in an unusual setting, standing "amazed in a new set of lines"; these are moments "when you hallucinate on the real, and see it in the context of its meaning" ("Four Bits" 68). Dillard portrays these moments as ones which imply meaning, yet as strong as this presentiment is, their significance remains unclear: "The mind returns to them; their meaning is never resolved. They are doors banging on their hinges, disturbing the peace" (69). We wake to mysteries, to questions begged by the waking, questions like Dillard's first question:

Where are we? We find ourselves *in medias res*. Waking, then, is "the dizzying overreal sensation of noticing that you are here" (*AC* 249), of becoming conscious of your own context, but more than that, of your very situatedness, aware of yourself as *being* in a place at this present moment. Waking "reveals us startlingly to ourselves as creatures set down here bewildered" (*WL* 73), that is, set down in a wilderness. In our be-wilderment, we look around "to discover at least *where* it is that we have been so startlingly set down, if we can't learn why" (*PTC* 12)." It is one of Dillard's most basic contentions that there is no obvious answer to the question "why are we here?" We wake "here"; we look around, noticing our world; yet, what we find is only ourselves ... here:

> It all got noticed: the horse's shoulders pumping; sunlight warping the air over a hot field; the way leaves turn color, brightly, cell by cell; and even the splitting, half-resigned and half-astonished feeling you have when you notice you are walking on earth for a while now—set down for a spell—in this particular time for no particular reason, here. (*AC* 213)

In a talk on the writing of *American Childhood*, Dillard summarizes the result of waking: "When you wake up, you notice that you're here" ("To Fashion a Text" 59). So, all "we know, at least for starters, is: here we—so incontrovertibly—are" (*PTC* 127). Statements like this one, often variations on "here we all are," become a refrain in Dillard's texts, depicting the surprise of waking. In *American Childhood*, for example, young Dillard's world opens out when she sees inside the back cover of her favorite book the list of people who have also signed it out: "There we all were" (*AC* 83). In *Encounters with Chinese Writers*, Dillard recounts her feeling at a meeting between American writers and publishers and some members of the Chinese literary establishment: "Here we all are—we foreigners, eager to please.... And here they all are—these handsome and alert men...." (16). And in *Holy the Firm*, Dillard recounts the experience of reawakening to the reality of suffering when little Julie's face is burnt: "We're tossed broadcast into time like so much grass, some ravening god's sweet hay," a god "brute and amok in his hugeness and idiocy," who seems to have "abandoned us to days, to time's tumult of occasions" (*HF* 42, 43). The narrator's response: "So this is where we are.... How could I have forgotten" (43).

"Here we all are," and like comments, seem to be Dillard's response to Thoreau's question, which she quotes in *Pilgrim*: "Talk of mysteries!—Think of our life in nature,—daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it.... the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! ... Who are we? *where* are we?" (144). As a deictic, "here" usually denotes specific location and locatedness in general but as Dillard's designator for the place we waken to find ourselves occupying it also connotes indefiniteness and nonspecificity of location. As such, it seems to be Dillard's response—though *not* her answer—to Thoreau's difficult question. "Here" is the wilderness in which we sojourn; we wake to find ourselves in a wilderness, a place in which one "wilders," loses one's way. Our location is, paradoxically, our unlocatedness.

"Here," the ground of our ungroundedness, the place in which we wake and find ourselves always sojourners, has several senses for Dillard. That is, Dillard sees man as a sojourner on all planes of his existence, physical, societal and spiritual. In the remainder of this section, I will sketch several of these types of sojourning.

Man is a sojourner in time. Etymologically, to "sojourn" is to "spend the day" (Ayto 487). The present moment is the temporal "here" of human experience. Though man always inhabits the present moment, he is paradoxically unable to get his bearings in time: "It is the best joke there is, that we are here, and fools—that we are sown into time like so much corn" (*HF* 42). Time is relative. Dillard measures it against the life spans of other creatures: "Trees are tough. They last, taproot and bark, and we soften at their feet. 'For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners:... there is none abiding'" (*PTC* 101). Life is marked by transience and flux, which man is unable to understand when he awakens into time: "There is, after all, time, eternity, and nothing else.... How long, O

Lord, will I be in transition, and when will I be home?" ("Four Bits" 69). Time, matter and space, then, are man's material givens. "Time is the warp and matter the weft of the woven texture of beauty in space, and death is the hurtling shuttle" (*PTC* 139–40).

Man also sojourns among men. Dillard holds the world to be morally neutral, offering passive resistance to humanity's "heartbreaking efforts to live well within it, to avoid pain to ourselves and others" (Foreword xv–xvi). This leaves man "a sojourner newly-bewildered in a life of unfathomable moral complexity, a life which engenders in every generation a thousand new forms of injustice" (xv–xvi). Society itself Dillard sees through her symbol of the mangrove islands as an "interlocked tangle of dependencies" and an accumulation, "a great and solacing muck of soil" which we have collected while floating across "nowhere" (*TST* 150, 52). Society is a random collection of the products of the life of man, and society is itself adrift. In *Encounters with Chinese Writers* Dillard depicts some of the interesting interactions between a group of American and Chinese writers. Some readers, she reports in the introduction, applauded her for the stories' "telling the truth about China" but she claims that she means only to give "a vivid sense of complexity," and since "the narrative and analyses ... are not value-free"—because she cannot hope to divest herself of her own culture and be "objective"—she settles for their yielding "contradictory impressions" (*ECW* 4). So there is no cultural promised land, no absolute, no point of reference for culture, and *Encounters* depicts this, taking cultural biases as biases, by situating the meeting of cultures in "a purified nonfiction narration—a kind of Chekovian storytelling which might illuminate the actual world with a delicate light—coupled with humor in the American tradition and no comment" (7).

We are also, in Dillard's eyes, pilgrims in a religious sense. Part of the mystery to which "we wake, if we ever wake, [is] the silence of God" (*HF* 62). As an epigraph to the second section of *Tickets to a Prayer Wheel*, Dillard quotes God's threat to his people through the prophet Amos:

> Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it. (*TPW* 65; Amos 8:11–12, KJV)

While she does seem to believe in the Christian God—she calls her faith a "shoddy Christianity," for instance ("Singing with the Fundamentalists" 315)—she also agrees with Pascal by quoting him twice: "Every religion that does not affirm that God is hidden is not true" (*TPW* 111; *PTC* 144). So man's life is a religious sojourn under the eye of God, who is hidden.

Dillard envisions this apparent absence as a kind of perpetual advent, a continuous kenosis, an enduring state of expectation of God's imminent appearance on earth.[13] Several of the poems in *Tickets for a Prayer Wheel* address the problem of man's relationship to the divine. The images in the poem "Bivouac," which immediately follows the epigraph from Amos, are of waking on a beach, as if shipwrecked, but also as if the person addressed as "you" in the poem has been newly created, or more precisely, has just been produced by evolution: "You were kindled from a clot / and washed on the beach like a conch / from one more witless wave" ("Bivouac" p. 69).[14] Dillard has described the tone of the poem as "that of God addressing a walking catfish" (qtd. in Hammond 33).[15] The poem itself does not situate this castaway on a specifically spiritual alien shore, but in light of the epigraph about God's silence and man's vain search for the word of the Lord, it suggests that Dillard considers man to be a spiritual sojourner. Even the conscious recognition of our "here-ness" does not answer the questions raised by our spiritual longing for the apparently absent God. The title poem of the collection addresses the problem of communicating with this God who is silent but who we nevertheless feel must be there. The search for this apparently silent, apparently absent God is also the topic of "An Expedition to the Pole," which I will discuss in Chapter Two.

In sum, then, Dillard considers man to be a sojourner on every level of his existence: physical, social, spiritual. When he wakes, he finds himself here, and that is all he seems able to discover. That he is a sojourner is the conclusion he reaches from his most basic experience of the world physically, socially and spiritually. The image of man as a sojourner in Dillard's texts is nicely focused by her reflections on a work of art she saw after waking into her own teens in Pittsburgh:

> In 1961, Giacometti's sculpture *Man Walking* won the International.... I saw the sculpture: a wiry, thin person, long legs in full stride, thrust his small, mute head forward into the empty air. Six feet tall, bronze.... I saw a stilled figure in a swirl of invisible motion. I saw a touchy man moving through a still void. Here was the thinker in the world—but there was no world, only the abyss through which he walked. Man Walking was pure consciousness made poignant: a soul without culture, absolutely alone, without even a time, without a people, speech, books, tools, work, or even clothes. He knew he was walking, here. He knew he was feeling himself walk; he knew he was walking fast and thinking slowly, not forming conclusions, not looking for anything. He himself was barely there. He was in spirit and in form a dissected nerve. He looked freshly made of clay by God, visibly pinched by sure fingertips. He looked like Adam depressed, as if there were no world. He looked like Ahasueras, condemned to wander without hope. His blind gaze faced the vanishing point. (*AC* 212).

Like man, *Man Walking* is a sojourner, aware of himself "here," where he has apparently been set down though he does not know why. He wanders, always, toward meaning.

Dancing: Aesthetics

Dillard's response to the recognition of our sojourning is to suggest that man's fundamental groundlessness might be turned into fertile ground. She claims that, whether the "enervating thoughts … of despair" produced by waking to the conditions

> … are true or not I find less interesting than *the possibilities for beauty they may hold*. We are down here in time, where beauty grows. Even if things are as bad as they could possibly be, and as meaningless, then matters of truth are themselves indifferent; we may as well please our sensibilities and, with as much spirit as we can muster, go out with a buck and a wing.[16] (152; italics added)

The mangrove island is Dillard's example. It survives beautifully.

> A mangrove island *turns drift to dance* … rocking over the salt sea at random, rocking day and night and round the sun, rocking round the sun and out toward east of Hercules. (152)

It may be, that is, that art supplies the sojourner with what he feels he lacks. The possibility for meaning, in Dillard's eyes, exists in our very groundedness in sojourning. For teen-aged Dillard, *Man Walking* provided an image of her feelings about her life. She took it as an artistic representation of man as sojourner. It helped order her understanding of her world.

According to Dillard, we have art precisely because we are sojourners. Finding himself a sojourner produces in man a "furious longing for order"; he casts this "spiritual longing … into the very teeth of matter—and comes up with art" (Foreword xvii). Art, then, is a product of man's awareness of himself as a sojourner "here" and his desire to make of this condition some kind of meaning. Accepting his position "here" and the given materials permits man to see the possibility of ordering those materials, creating beauty and order, and in their creation finding meaning. The aesthetic of sojourning turns drift to dance.

Aesthetics usually answers the question Why is there art? only incidentally in its investigation of other questions like What is art?, What is good Art? and What is the value of art? Perhaps the first question is properly an anthropological or psychological one, or even religious in nature; its answer, however, is the starting point for Dillard's aesthetic. Dillard bases her understanding of art in her epistemology, for, as she says,

> Any penetrating interest in anything ultimately leads to what used to be called epistemology [now, "cognition"]. If you undertake the least mental task—if you so much as try to classify a fern—you end up agog in the lap of Kant. (*LF* 53)

She sees man as an epistemological sojourner: our "looking around" is hampered by a fundamental uncertainty and lack of final knowledge. We wake, then look around to find out what we can about where we are. And this is where our troubles begin, for at base, there "is no epistemological guarantee between *any* subject and *any* object" (*LF* 131). Our senses cannot provide us with sufficient information: "Inhibitors in our neurons edit the garbled impressions of our meager senses before they reach our programmed brains" (*LF* 132). Even our methodologically purest form of investigation, science, is unable to

> paw through its own language and cultural assumptions, its *a priori* categories, wishes, and so forth, to approach things as they are. To what, in fact, could the phrase, 'things as they are' meaningfully refer apart from all our discredited perceptions, to which everything is so inextricably stuck? (55)

We value objectivity, yet all our methods for gaining knowledge of our situation seem at best biased, and at worst unable to provide us any knowledge at all (132). This lack of objectivity, this epistemological sojourning, can be seen in the fact that,

> Although all the generations of people, ever since we can remember—artists, thinkers, cranks, and pagans of every stripe—have intensively sought and sometimes found meaning in the natural world, none of those meanings has 'stuck.' Nowhere does

> any consensus agree upon any set of human meanings for the natural world, but only the human world. (*LF* 182)

So, while the natural world can be studied and even understood well enough for us to "hit the very moon" (185)—"We have come a long way on probable knowledge" (133)—the proper subject of man's search for meaning is his own world:

> Our dwelling places where we dwell, along continental coasts and inland river valleys, are the only sites where what we want and so fiercely imagine can be found, the brain's own baby doll: purpose, significance, and harmony. (182)

Meaning, it is apparent, is contextual, and man is the context. She illustrates this point with a vivid image in her essay, "Total Eclipse":

> If you were to glance out one day and see a row of mushroom clouds rising on the horizon, you would know at once that what you were seeing, remarkable as it was, was intrinsically not worth remarking. Significant as it was, it [would] not matter a whit. For what is significance? It is significance for people. No people, no significance. This is all I have to tell you. (*TST* 94)

Art is one of the products of human culture which gives us the order, the "purpose, significance, harmony" we lack, the order we are unable to find in nature by means of our "objective" tools. It gives us order in our language, so to speak, within our own context, within human history, culture, society. Art is a vital part of our basic human endeavor, which Dillard says "is to extend the boundaries of sense and meaning; it is to shift phenomena one by one out of the nonsense heap and arrange them in ordered piles about us" (132). As sojourners, our effort is to colonize more of the here and now as home, to ground ourselves in some kind of meaning, even if that meaning is meaning we make. Becker says that Dillard's prophetic insight and message is that

> We are always making something. We make the material things we need to survive, and then we make a choice: to go on with the insect-like fixity making more and more material things, or to go

> beyond our physical needs and make visions of the world. It is all a making.
>
> But the fact that we make our visions does not subvert their claim to our belief. (Becker 412)

Art, then, is a product of our sense of ourselves as epistemological sojourners. We have art because we feel like sojourners.

Dillard's answer to the second question of aesthetics, What is art?, is that an art object is "a controlled context whose parts cohere within an order according to which they must be understood. Context is meaning": "Art remakes the world according to sense" (*LF* 177). Art then is a kind of formal system. As such, it works by assigning meanings within a context which it establishes. It is interesting, Dillard says, to consider literature "as a formal assignment of meaning to many things with the great world, as a kind of interpretative criticism with the great world as its object" (147). Such a formal system—science is Dillard's other example—works "the way a tight-rope walker works: by not looking at its feet. As soon as it looks at its feet, it realizes it is operating in midair" (*LF* 55). Dillard acknowledges art's inability to connect itself to any solid ground. She is referring to this quality of art when she discusses the writing of *Holy the Firm* in this comment from *The Writing Life*: "Each sentence hung over an abyssal ocean or sky which held all possibilities, as well as the possibility of nothing" (*WL* 89). She also acknowledges the formal quality of art when she describes "the essay as art" as those pieces which "have a structure and form which is not merely discursive, but instead reflexive, internally ordered, self-referential" (qtd. in Hammond 33). Some may object that the meaning art creates out in midair is pointless since it is grounded in nothing other than itself. But Dillard replies to this complaint,

> If you argue that this endeavor yields only a human kind of sense, and that our interpretations yield only human meanings, not absolute meanings, you will be required to propose a definition of meaning that is *not*, first and last, meaning for people. (133)

Because she sees art's ability to order bits of the world as one of its most important qualities, Dillard tends to emphasize formal matters in her discussion of art. For instance, of the writer she claims, he

> makes real artistic meaning of meaninglessness … by creating a self-relevant artistic whole. He produces a work whose parts cohere.… In this structural unity lies integrity, and it is integrity which separates art from nonart. (*LF* 28)

And the essayist, in particular,

> thinks about actual things. He can make sense of them analytically or artistically. In either case he renders the real world coherent and meaningful, even only bits of it, and even if that coherence and meaning reside only inside small texts. (*BAE* xvii)

Meaningless art, Dillard maintains, would be "a contradiction in terms" (32). And although structuring a work of art is a "difficult, heartbreaking task," to fail to go to the trouble to order an artwork is to subscribe to the imitative fallacy, namely, that by being itself meaningless, art imitates a meaningless world (31). Dillard claims that the modernist and postmodernist technique of "the fragmentation of narrative line," for instance, is a highly controlled formal aspect of fiction (30); that is, it suggests the fragmentation of modern life within its controlled and ordered technique. Without formal control, a work can yield no sense to an interpreter, and "sense … is the basal criterion for art" (32); it is in structure that "meaning resides" ("The Purification of Poetry" 295).[17]

In a discussion of modernism and modernist criticism, Dillard points out that, "When it is written by artists, art criticism always emphasizes forms and surfaces. It always calls for more technical purity than it practices, for generalities about art focus on goals" ("Purification" 295). Though she also emphasizes form, she does not neglect content. The artist orders something, namely, his materials, which he always takes from the world. The possibility for art is created by "time itself … churn[ing] out scenes," producing the materials which the "thinking mind will analyze, and the creative imagination will link" (*BAE* xxii). When the arts are purged of the so-called inessentials "they dissolve into concepts; they lose the material energy which made them interesting" (*LF* 171).

Dillard admires those authors who are able to develop literary artifacts in which formal features and representational features work equally well, maintaining a balance and dividing the reader's "attention more or less evenly between the world of their books and the art of their books" ("To Fashion a Text" 72). She says her own goal is to "direct the reader's attention in equal parts to the text—as formal object—and the world, as an interesting place in which we find ourselves" (67). She differentiates between plain prose and fine prose, plain prose being that style which points to the world and fine prose being that which draws attention to the hand with which it points. It is her contention that language always refers, however, so that the literary arts always "do two things at once.... They point to the world with a hand. I think the very finest works of art do both things at once and well" (*LF* 123).

Dillard's response to the third question of aesthetics, regarding the value of art, also uses both form and content as a standard. On the formal side, Dillard considers art intrinsically valuable. Emphasizing order as she does, she values the effort taken in ordering the materials in a work of art into a coherent whole. In *Living by Fiction* she vents the "crackpot notion" that a work of art is a kind of anti-entropy machine, that the order and integrity of a work of art contributes to the sum of the order of the universe.

> Perhaps a decent line in a decent sonnet weighs in the balance with a bonfire, say, or the force of a very high tide. Could a complex and ordered novel pull the stars from their courses? (*LF* 174)

Though she treats this idea self-deprecatingly, it is not inconsistent with her emphasis on art's ability to supply order, though it does elevate this potential from the strictly human sphere to a universal thermodynamic plane. This notion of the power and value of art treads the line between figurative and actual truth. It is a way of saying that art has real power, since "any order partakes of universal order" (*LF* 183). It is also her affirmation that what the artist does is intrinsically worthwhile, since even a work without audience she affirms to be "worth your life" ("Purification" 299). This notion is not an elitist formalism, though. Potentially, it values every person's contribution to the order of the universe. Art is particularly valued as a highly coherent object, which creates through its complexity the possibility for new ordered relationships. Dillard claims not to take this notion too seriously, though. And while she is interested in the purity of art and the value of what it does, she does not emphasize its formal qualities to the exclusion of such insignificant factors as whether or not it can gain an audience: while she claims that even "an excellent poem in the drawer" is of value, she says so "less faintly every year" ("Purification" 299f).

Art, then, also needs an audience. Pure form plus a bit of surface texture grants a text some intrinsic value, and makes it "lit critable," potentially giving it some usefulness to critics ("Purification" 299). But art needs materials. It needs something to structure. And it is art's "material energy" which makes it interesting, which attracts an audience to it, and, therefore, gives it the potential for value beyond the abstract and formal. The ordered nature of art, "the coherent relationships among those materials[,] serve[s] as a kind of rocket fuel, so to speak, which propels the object into the regions it explores" (*LF 171*). The artist does with reality what everyone does, tries to understand it in terms of meaning; but artists also create new possibilities for meaning in the creation of ordered, complex works, texts, for instance, whose relationships among materials might generate new ways of seeing and thinking about the world in terms of order.

> As symbol, or as the structuring of symbols, art can render intelligible—or at least visible, at least discussible—those wilderness regions which philosophy has abandoned and those hazardous terrains which science's tools do not fit. I mean the rim of knowledge where language falters; and I mean all those areas of human experience, feeling, and thought about which we care so

> much and know so little: the meaning of all that we see before us … (*LF* 170)

"The art object … is a *cognitive instrument* which presents to us, in a stilled and enduring context, a model of previously unarticulated or unavailable relationships among ideas and materials," with which we can "deepen our understanding" of this universe and our place in it (*LF 184*).

Art assists us in our search for order by ordering. A given literary text, for example, "elicits an interpretation of the world by being itself a worldlike object for interpretation" (155). Reading a literary work, we "will be led to formulate a set of relationships obtaining in the work which will correspond (since words always refer) to a limited exaggerated interpretation of experience itself" (155). In this way the work is not an interpretive tool for the artist only, but also for the reader who uses the simulacrum to measure the actual world—in what Dillard refers to as "a subtle pedagogy"(*LF* 155)—agreeing or disagreeing with the view presented in the work, or letting it inform him, thereby "expand[ing] the arc of the comprehended universe" (*LF* 170), the sphere that artist and reader are able to order.

Dillard says she leans toward the Platonic view "that any coherent order is true insofar as it is order, as it partakes in the universal order." However, she refuses to disregard the possibility that reality is meaningless and incoherent. "The idea of ordering is actual," she claims; but she also admits that the problem remains:

> do the ordered relationships among all parts which we find in a great short story or sonnet exist in nature? Do the reflexive structures and intellectual patterns and purpose which we find in art—do these obtain elsewhere? Or do we merely make them up because our minds are uniquely adapted for making things up? (*LF* 180)

Dillard considers this "an appalling possibility," but it is a possibility she will not ignore.

Especially in the relatively theoretical context of *Living by Fiction*, Dillard's response to the question of meaning is open-ended. To the question, what "if anything [do] these artistic coherencies have to do with the actual world?" she answers, "I am sorry; I do not know" (177, 185). It seems that this fundamental crux of epistemology is the spur to her own creative efforts. Her answer to this problem is the same as the response to waking to the reality of sojourning: "And here we all are" (182). We are back to a position of sojourning. We sojourn in the wilderness lying between these two options (meaning out there vs. meaning in here, and meaningfulness vs. meaninglessness). What we can do en route is turn drift to dance, turn these possibilities into art: into beauty and order. Art is our only answer to sojourning, but its own answer is suspended in midair like any formal system's: "It's all we've got to bind thing and thing, to bind the heart and the hard rock ground: art, the heavenly harmonies, translated into the soul's own lowdown blues. It's all we've got, and so it is enough" (Foreword xvii).

In the following two chapters, I will examine how Dillard works this aesthetic out in her nonfiction and fiction. In Chapter Two I will discuss ways in which Dillard attempts, in her nonfiction, to waken her readers to the conditions. In Chapter Three I will examine Dillard's fictional portrayal of sojourning.

CHAPTER TWO

Unexpecting the Expected: Awareness of "The Conditions" in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*

In her collection of essays, *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (1982), Annie Dillard is, as elsewhere, primarily concerned with the conditions in which man's life is lived and with man's efforts to find meaning within those conditions. Each of the collection's essays brings to the fore an aspect of man's existence which contributes to his sense of himself as a sojourner. For instance, "Life on the Rocks: The Galápagos" puts man in an evolutionary context as a product of the physically harsh conditions on the planet;[18] "The Deer at Providencia" makes one consider the ubiquity and the meaninglessness of suffering, animal and human;[19] "Total Eclipse" describes one reason for man's feeling "alone in the universe," namely his recognition of "the universe as a clockwork of loose spheres flung at stupefying, unauthorized speeds" (97, 100–01). Other essays foreground conditions such as the shortness of man's time on earth and the speed with which life—and the weekend!—passes and the silence of God in a natural environment which, paradoxically, seems to speak meaning.[20] However, the main point of these essays and of the whole collection is not to illuminate the conditions themselves. Rather, Dillard uses these discussions of the conditions to make her readers aware of the way in which their expectations can shape their perceptions of those conditions. As she puts it in "Total Eclipse," "usually it is a bit of a trick to keep your knowledge from blinding you" (*TST 90*). By forcing her readers to notice their preconceptions, Dillard hopes to make them aware of the conditions and of themselves as sojourners, visitors in a not quite comprehensible world.

Several critics have noticed Dillard's effort in her nonfiction to expand her readers' awareness of themselves in their world. In a review of *Teaching*, McFadden calls Dillard a "visionary [who] can synthesize, make connections, help the reader to see in a new way"; she describes Dillard's use of "the telling phrase" which forces "the reader to hear in a different key, so to speak" (774). Dunn also comments on Dillard's use of stylistic devices, specifically her "tonal strategies," which "help the readers see by inviting, cajoling, surprising them into adopting new ways of looking" (Dunn 28). Becker discusses a kind of writer he refers to as "self-conscious architects of infinite vistas"; he includes Dillard in their number. These authors "manage to challenge us to look beyond personal experiences, theirs and ours, to fundamental mysteries that escape control and definition"; they achieve this effect "by the deliberate construction of honest, complete, and self-sufficient texts [which] call our attention to the disconcerting dimensions of the universe beyond words" (Becker 402). Clark asserts that Dillard's narrative persona "is the paradoxical subject explored by symbolist and modernist poetics: the one who breaks the cultural traditions coded by language, who opens up imprisoning conventionality"; this narrator, Clark claims, uses metaphor as the "kind of utterance [that] might break the hold of the expected phrase" (Clark 121). I will argue that Dillard does this with the extended metaphoricity of magic realism. In *Teaching*, Dillard finds a tool in the juxtaposing of alternate realities or views of reality which breaks the hold of the expected.

The power of expectations to shape "reality" is the explicit topic of several essays in *Teaching*. But even in those essays focusing on particular aspects of the conditions, Dillard's technique is working to make her readers aware of seeing as a process. Nonfiction ordinarily shows its reader a view of the world. In making her nonfiction literary, Dillard prompts the reader to see the world and also to notice the essay as an art object. The essay becomes both a window and a mirror, then, through which the reader sees the world and in which the reader sees himself seeing the world. After making the reader aware of perception, she challenges his expectations, primarily by juxtaposing two disparate realms in such a way that the reader's expectations for both are challenged.

In this chapter I will endeavor to demonstrate that Dillard's essays depict the conditions in such a way that the reader's expectations about what constitutes reality are challenged, or at least foregrounded. First, I will illustrate the potential ability of readers' expectations to shape their experience of a text by engaging in a (somewhat fictional reconstruction of a) reading of two versions of an essay appearing in *Teaching*, "In the Jungle." Second, with "On a Hill Far Away" as an example, I will discuss how Dillard uses readers' generic expectations to stimulate their close interaction with her text. Third, I will demonstrate that, in several essays in *Teaching*, Dillard operates in a novel, sub-generic mode which I refer to as the magic realist essay. In essays like "Lenses," "God in the Doorway," and especially in "An Expedition to the Pole," Dillard unites two disparate realms of experience, two competing "realities."

Judging an Essay by its Package: "Jungle Peace" versus "In the Jungle"

"In the Jungle," the third essay in *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, first appeared in a magazine called *Holiday* as "Jungle Peace" (September 1975). In this context, it is everything that one would expect to find in such a magazine—namely, a travel article. Dillard tells the story of her winter vacation to the Napo River in Ecuador, what she saw, and why she liked it. The article is filled with facts about the region, and the authenticity of its image of the place is confirmed by several photos. One of Dillard in contented profile, wearing a wide-banded stetson and traveller's camouflage fatigues, stands in lieu of a by-line at the head of the first column of text. Another, filling the facing page, shows her gazing in hatless wonder at an enormous silk-cotton tree, the tree she describes overleaf as one whose flanged trunk could "make three smooth walls of a room … where you'd gladly live or die" ("In the Jungle" 26). A third photo confirms that Dillard's hair really was braided by smiling, laughing Quechua girls, as she reports in the article. The photos help focus the reader's attention on the world described in the piece. They also show Dillard enjoying herself in the Amazon Basin, precisely the point of any good travel article: "This writer will vouch for the fun you will have in this place." As an article selected, packaged and published by the editors of a travel magazine, it appears in these pages in order to attract tourists to the region. The writer's best efforts at vivid description and evocative narrative seem wholly directed toward persuading me to subscribe to a view of how things are in South America—"nice"—and to make reservations in order to confirm this new-formed opinion for myself. As a travel article, "Jungle Peace" is the verbal equivalent of a travel brochure, appreciated for the sense of place it conveys more than for its inherent value as a crafted and polished aesthetic object. Any reflection precipitated by this piece will be about warm rain forest nights and Indian children.[21]

When I read this same piece in *Teaching*, there entitled "In the Jungle," I have different expectations. On the back cover of my edition of the collection, Harper and Row provide the cue: LITERATURE. As a result, I'm not expecting thinly veiled travel advertisements, as I am in *Holiday*, but literary nonfiction, especially if I have read Dillard previously. I now note aspects of the piece I might well have missed in my travel-magazine mode of browsing. Instead of photos directing my attention to the objective reality of the Quechua Indians and the silk-cotton trees, there are only the words with which Dillard portrays their world. Reading in a more literary mode, I am likely to notice the piece's stylistic features, like the felicities of phrase in this passage:[22]

> one of the village's Jesuit priests began playing an alto recorder, playing a wordless song, lyric, in a minor key, that twined over the village clearing, that caught in the big trees' canopies, muted our talk on the bankside, and wandered over the river, dissolving downstream. (54)

I might not have noticed the quiet elegance of this prose when I was expecting the factual, content-oriented mode of discourse typical of magazines. Expecting literature, I am more likely to read for both style and content, so now I become aware of the essay as an aesthetic object *and* as factual description.

The piece itself is basically unchanged.[23] The facts are all still there, but I no longer take it as a sales-pitch for South America; now the descriptions and narrative persuade me that Dillard saw the Napo River as she describes it, and that the representation is of both a place and a larger vision of reality. I may still agree that the Amazon basin would be a nice place to visit or live, but now I notice and am interested enough to investigate more carefully Dillard's more general point, even to reread the piece.[24]

Dillard's point in the piece is about expectations. She says,

> the point of going somewhere like the Napo River in Ecuador is not to see the most spectacular anything. It is simply to see what is there. We are here on the planet only once, and might as well get a feel for the fringes and hollows in which life is lived, for the Amazon basin… and for the life that—there, like anywhere else—is always and necessarily lived in detail. ("In the Jungle" 55)

She uses the essay's Ecuadorian detail to support a general view of life, then, rather than a particular view of where you should spend your next vacation and your next vacation dollar. And that point is that life's detail is of the essence and that one way to become aware of this ubiquitous detail is to travel to an "out of the way" place. Travel itself challenges the expectation that places far removed from our own lives are "out of the way": "Out of the way of *what?*… of human life, tenderness, or the glance of heaven?" (53). Seeing a different culture, seeing what else is out there, might help us break out of such a limiting mode of viewing reality, might enable us to see more detail than we expect to see.

I have tried to illustrate with these brief, contrasting readings of the same article how expectations, in this case cued by the context of publication, can shape a reader's response. Based on empirical studies of reading processes, Zwann suggests that people automatically (i.e., not consciously) adjust their "comprehension control systems" based on their assumptions about discourse-type (153). This finding is related to a well established paradigm in cognitive and social psychology, known as "scripts" or "schemata." Mark Johnson, for instance, says that schemata "give expectations and anticipations that influence our interactions with our environment" (21), and claims that

> in order for us to have meaningful, connected experiences that we can comprehend and reason about, there must be pattern and order to our actions, perceptions, and conceptions. A schema is a recurrent pattern, shape, and regularity in, or of, these ongoing ordering activities.[25] (29)

So, in a process analogous to contextual expectations shaping a reading experience, our expectations about what constitutes reality shape our perceptions.

The benefit of these schemata or scripts is that, like reflexes on the neural level, they economize on the mental effort required for common actions, allowing us to get more done than we ever could if everything was encountered as new every time.[26] Unfortunately, "This economy of storage has a side effect of poor memory for detail" (Schank and Abelson 19). It is this very detail which, according to Dillard, is of the essence. The detail she relates in "Jungle" is the significant thing about life in the Napo Valley, "on the tributaries, in the riverside villages, sucking this *particular* white-fleshed guava in this *particular* pattern of shade" ("In the Jungle" 55; italics added). The detail of any place is what makes it "*in* the way" (59). In "Life on the Rocks," she says that, in response to the harshness of life, "We can sing only *specifics*, time's rambling tune, the places we have seen, the faces we have known" (130; italics added). In a prose sketch entitled "In Transit," Dillard suggests that travel can open one's eyes to the detail of life, freeing one from the potential limitations imposed by expectations:

> There are times out of mind, times spent alone in a strange place waiting … Travel multiplies your opportunities to wake on a bench or a beach, to stand amazed in a new set of lines.[27] ("Four Bits" 68)

Dillard's point is the same in both "Jungle Peace" and "In the Jungle"; however, because of the way my expectations are shaped by contextual cues, I am more likely to get the point when I read it in *Teaching*.

Challenging Generic Expectations: "On a Hill Far Away"

"On a Hill Far Away" cues its reader to the set of expectations appropriate to it in its opening sentences: "In Virginia, late one January afternoon while I had a leg of lamb in the oven, I took a short walk. The idea was to exercise my limbs and rest my mind, but these things rarely work out as I plan" (*TST* 77).[28] These sentences suggest that this is a story. Hesse comments that this opening draws the reader into the piece with the "promise that the narrative will lead us somewhere worth going" ("Stories in Essays" 185). And indeed, as the narrator relates the events in her walk—crossing Tinker Creek, climbing a hill along a fence and finally meeting a little boy—the reader moves with her expectantly toward a climax, toward the narratological place we assume will be worth visiting.[29]

If the reader has read through the five essays preceding "On a Hill," he has encountered three essays that open with narratives; all six make rich use of narrative, so the reader supposes that this piece might also be a narrative essay. In his discussion of "On a Hill," Hesse suggests that the piece is engaging more than simply narrative expectations. He acknowledges that the piece also draws us with another expectation, "the expectation of meaning," which, he seems to claim, is a different, less powerful impulse in this piece than the anticipation of narrative closure. His argument for this expectation arises from his seeing "On a Hill" as an example of what he calls "essays with narrative" (185). But why does he classify it as an essay? All that can be deduced from the piece itself, especially from its "once upon a time" opening, is that it is a narrative. "On a Hill" does share a first person point of view with the collection's other pieces, and essays do rely on this kind of narratorial presence and subjectivity;

nevertheless, the presence of the narrator alone is not enough to suggest it is anything other than narrative. In his reading of "On a Hill," Hesse has unintentionally illustrated my point in the previous section, that contextual cues shape the reading experience, since the only reason to call this piece an essay is that most of its neighbors in *Teaching* are fairly easily classified as essays.

Even the assumption that the piece is nonfictional narration relies on its context more than its content. When an essay includes an extended narrative related in the first person, the assumption is that it is a true account of the essayist's own experience, since, as Dillard puts it, "The elements of nonfiction should be … veracious, for that is the convention and covenant between the nonfiction writer and his reader" (*BAE* xvii). But since only its context suggests that "On a Hill" is an essay, it is only the context that suggests it should be taken as nonfictional narration, and therefore as a true story.

In isolation, this piece could not even be called a "story/comment essay," a hybrid form which would seem to be a natural conjunction of essay and narrative conventions, and which would satisfy both sets of expectations evoked by this piece. Zeiger classifies the first piece in *Teaching*, "Living Like Weasels," as one of these, consisting of the "orientation, complicating action, resolution" pattern of a story, and an evaluative comment, which calls "attention to what the narrator feels is remarkable or important about the story," and which "is subordinated to and intimately involved with the story, highlighting its drama" (239–40).[30] Dillard nowhere provides the kind of explication of meaning that one might expect when reading "On a Hill" as a combination of essay and narrative, nowhere steps out of the purified nonfictional narrative mode[31] she assumes in this piece, into the essayist's more typical stance as interpreter of the world.[32]

Taken on its own merits, then, "On a Hill" is simply a narrative. Yet, in spite of this conclusion, I do not mean to suggest that a responsible reader should studiously disregard the combination of expectations evoked by its context and the piece's own use of conventions. The not entirely compatible sets of expectations it elicits actually work together to draw the reader into the piece, encouraging him to read for significance in several ways or on several levels; that is, Dillard manipulates this conjunction of expectations in order to induce a literary reading of her piece. In a discussion of the narrative essay, she posits that essay writers have taken to hiding their narrative essays behind short story façades because they "(quite reasonably) want to be understood as artists, and they aren't sure that the essay form invites the sort of critical analysis the works deserve" (*BAE* xiv). By embedding "On a Hill" within a collection of essays, with the resulting disjunctive set of expectations, she ensures that it will get the kind of attention I am paying it right now, whether it is "actually" an essay or a nonfiction narrative.[33]

Reading "On a Hill" as a true story, I am primarily interested in understanding what Dillard finds significant enough about these events to make them worth relating. This kind of significance could perhaps be called the "human interest" value of the story, a curiosity with the detail of human life similar to that promoted in "In the Jungle." The narrator's interaction with a little boy provides this kind of significance in "On a Hill."

After climbing the hill from Tinker Creek, she sees the boy playing in some kind of yard. Though the boy is friendly, she finds him oddly reserved and formal for a child of about eight. After they chat awkwardly for a short time, the boy suddenly asks whether the narrator knows "the Lord as [her] personal savior?"; this reminds the narrator that she has met the boy's mother, who asked the same question. Though she thinks of the boy as "a nice little kid," the narrator spends the rest of her time with him trying to withdraw from the conversation to get back to her roast and whatever it is she should be reading. Thinking he is saying whatever comes to mind just to keep her around, she pities the boy, condescendingly, for his loneliness. Eventually, however, she recognizes that he is sincerely offering himself to her, but it is too late for her to respond to him "all over again, identically but sincerely" (82). Child and adult then part "sadly," just after dark, he trudging home, and she returning to her lamb roast. The significance this piece yields to a reading of it as story lies in its depiction of an abortive social interaction, hampered by the narrator's preoccupation with her own thoughts and plans. It illustrates the way in which we often allow the relatively minor details of our lives to interfere with what we should value, our interactions with other individuals.[34]

Attempting to read the piece as essay, searching for the "point" which an essay generally makes but which the narrator does not make in "On a Hill," I turn to the elements of the story as symbols. Dillard has stated that she is "especially interested in narrative essays that mix plain facts and symbolic facts, or that transform plain facts into symbolic facts.... These are bold contrivances" (*BAE* xx). "On a Hill" yields interesting results to a reading of it as symbolic narrative.

Working backward from the moral conclusion about the difficulty we experience in seeing through our expectations and knowing others accurately, I might see this symbolically represented in the mare and foal that Dillard and the boy watch: "The foal wanted to approach. Every time it looked at us, the mare ran interference and edged the foal away" (78).[35] Another symbolic boundary is the barbed-wire fence which the narrator follows up the hill from Tinker Creek but never crosses. The boy remains on the other side of the fence; they talk over it. As he warms up to Dillard, he moves "closer to the barbed-wire fence" (81), but the barrier between them seems fixed.[36] In the analeptic passage recounting the narrator's meeting the mother, there is a similar figurative barrier: "She did not ask me in.... I waited on the other side of the *screen door*.... While I waited on the other side of the *screen door* she fetched pamphlets..." (*TST* 80; italics added).[37] These boundaries suggest that Dillard and the mother and her boy occupy different realms which meet but do not overlap. Though the barrier between their two worlds seems semi-permeable, no significant contact is made across it.

One of the things which seems to erect the barriers preventing interaction is presupposition. Dillard deals with expectations in this piece with explicit and implicit references to witnessing. The question of Christian witnessing, "Do you know the Lord as your personal savior," which, in the story, seems "intrusive, inappropriately verbal, obsessive with duty, insensitive to context" (Peterson 186n34), expects a certain response—"No"—and therefore stereotypes "everyone else" as "unbelievers"; that is, all others are potentially or probably *un*saved. Thus, the boy's mother is "stunned that I knew the Lord, and clearly uncertain whether we were referring to the same third party" (80). Dillard doesn't condemn this form of witness, admitting "It makes sense, given its premises"; but she confesses that it makes her feel uncomfortable—"I wanted to … run" (80)—and excluded, even though she can assent to the question.

The narrator's insight at the end of "On a Hill," part of the significance of the event, is that she has also failed to witness appropriately. In "Teaching a Stone to Talk," Dillard says that witnessing is an appropriate attitude to take toward reality. The *palo santo* trees she notices on the Galápagos Islands interest her "as emblems of the muteness of the human stance in relation to all that is not human. I see us all as *palo santo* trees, holy sticks, together watching all that we watch, and growing in silence" (TST 74). She expresses a desire "to come back as a *palo santo* tree, so that I could be, myself, a perfect witness, and look, mute, and wave my arms" (76). In "On a Hill," the narrator falls short of the ideal, shaping her own response to the boy when she makes repeated inferences from his slightly odd behavior. When he does not notice her approach, even though "The dogs were going crazy … because of me," she assumes, "he must be too little to know much about dogs" (78). Because he is "formal and articulate," referring to his father as "Father," she caricatures him as "an Earnest Child … a fraud," "*le bourgeois gentilhomme*," wondering what his parents let him read (79, 82). Because of these presuppositions, she fails to attend to the boy, does not interest herself in him, worrying instead about her roast and the reading she should be doing. She fails to see (to witness) the reality to which the boy bears witness: to his inner life, recognizing only too late her insincerity and failure.

The story's religious symbols and allusions work together with the image of witnessing to comment on expectations. The piece's title refers to the hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross":

> On a hill far away stood the old, rugged cross,
> The emblem of suffering and shame;
> And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
> For a world of lost sinners was slain.[38]

In light of this allusion, the "eight-foot aluminum cross" in front of the boy's "big house at the top of the hill" is no longer just a kitschy but factual detail (79); it stands in ironic contrast to the splintery, wooden cross suggested by the hymn, implying a different mode of witness than Christ's, whose is perfect witness, like the *palo santo's*. The empty cross stands witness to Christ's salvific work, representing the bridging of the gap between two realities, between divine reality and human, between God and man.

So, while the chasm between God and man has been spanned, human attempts at witness show that a gap still separates humans. Ironically, the very attempt to bear witness to religious truth, felt by the witness to be of the utmost importance, erects barriers between people, especially when this witnessing is based on the assumption that no one else has seen the light.

Other elements of the story align themselves around the image of the cross. The boy becomes something of a Christ figure: he is son of an absent, feared and possibly dangerous capital-F Father. The Trinity is completed with the pamphlet given the narrator by the boy's mother on the Holy Spirit. Like a good fisher of men, the boy describes how to fish without line or tackle, and hooks Dillard into staying around a while longer. In a final effort to interest her, he describes stepping on a snake "'while walking through the field beneath the cemetery'"; this seems to be the narrator's allusion to Christ's stepping on Satan's head by dying, harrowing hell, and being resurrected.[39] In failing to see beyond her first impressions of the boy, in failing to witness his bearing witness to himself, Dillard seems to think she has missed an encounter with the "personal savior" of the Christian's question.[40] By bringing two sets of expectations into play, those for narrative and those for essay, Dillard tries to ensure that the reader will not similarly forego this encounter, at least not in "On a Hill Far Away."

Juxtaposing Realities: The Magic Realist Essay

In the previous sections, I have suggested that generic expectations, evoked by the context and content of a piece of literature, shape a reader's experience of a text. Dillard's point in the two pieces discussed is a similar one, that expectations shape our experience of reality. In several other essays in *Teaching*, Dillard makes the same point, and does so by juxtaposing normally disparate views of reality or conjoining incompatible realms of existence, creating an essay form which combines the real and the magical or fantastic.[41]

In fiction, this kind of conjunction of realities is often the technique and subject of magic realism. In his article, "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse," Stephen Slemon says that the oxymoronic term "suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy" (10). He describes magic realist fiction as depicting and enacting this conflict in its "language of narration":

> a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other. Since the ground rules of these two worlds are incompatible, neither can fully come into being, and each remains suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the 'other,' a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences. (10–11)[42]

In his narratology based on possible world semantics, Pavel touches on the aspect of fiction on which magic realist fiction plays:

> the worlds that mix together in [fictional] texts may resemble the actual world, but they may be impossible or erratic worlds as well. Works of fiction more or less dramatically combine incompatible world-structures, play with the impossible, and incessantly speak about the unspeakable. Yet they most often present themselves as linguistically coherent texts, gently obeying stylistic and generic conventions. (62)

It is precisely here that magic realist texts deviate, and it is this deviation that creates their peculiar evocativeness. Slemon argues that, within a post-colonial context, magic realist fiction works to represent the metaphysical clash initiated by colonization, especially as that clash is worked out in the culture's language: on this level,

> magic realist narrative recapitulates a dialectical struggle within the culture's language, a dialectic between "codes of recognition" inherent within the inherited language and those imagined codes—perhaps utopian or future-oriented—that characterize a culture's "original relations" with the world. (12)

In several essays in *Teaching*, Dillard adapts magic realism to her nonfiction. She does so by creating tensions between two incompatible modes of discourse, between the essay's standard realism and a fantastic reality apparently incompatible with the essay's realistic discourse. Nonfiction deals in veracity, and when it narrates, describes or argues, its subject matter is assumed to be real, true things. Even when the essayist's view of these real things is idiosyncratic, the essay is taken as a true representation of her perception of things.[43] Realism is not an option but a given in nonfictional narration. It is the essayist's covenant with the reader (see *BAE* xvii, quoted above). In the magic realist essay, however, "fabulous and fantastical events are included in [an essay] that otherwise maintains the 'reliable' tone of objective realistic report" (to adapt Baldick's definition of magic realist fiction, 128). The fantastic elements are introduced into the essay without comment. While the essayist may offer an interpretation of the fantastic, just as she interprets her realistic material, in the magic realist essay, this commentary evinces no awareness that these magical elements are fantastic or impossible. There is no incredulity evident in the tone; even if the essayist does seem surprised, it is not the type or degree of shock one would expect from someone who has just seen the impossible; that is, the essayist does not seem as surprised as the reader is at the incursion of the unreal into the realistic. While the essay commonly contains symbols, as in "On a Hill," the magic realist essay's symbolism or metaphoricity is extended to the point that it becomes impossible for the reader to determine which element is the tenor and which the vehicle.[44] As in magic realist fiction, the two realities remain "locked in a continuous dialectic."

"Lenses"

In "Lenses," Dillard juxtaposes temporally distinct perceptions of reality in order to challenge the reader's expectations. In the first half of this piece, Dillard describes learning, as a child, to see through a microscope, trying to catch on to the trick of "seeing through one eye, with both eyes open" and the "paradoxical maneuver" of moving "the glass slide to the right if you are following a creature who is swimming off to the left" (*TST* 104). Through her microscope, she watched Spirogyra and rotifers in drops of pond water until the seventy-five watt bulb she used as a light source evaporated the water in a miniature end-of-the-world: "Over and over again, the last trump sounded, the final scroll unrolled, and the known world drained, dried, and vanished" (106).[45] This story's inherent interest is as a tale of childhood curiosity. As I read it, I expect it to be an illustrative instance of the topic of the essay: "You get used to looking through lenses...." (104). Half way into the piece, though, Dillard surprises me:

> ... But oddly, this is a story about swans. It is not even a story; it is a description of swans. This description of swans includes the sky

> over a pond, a pair of binoculars, and a mortal adult who had long since moved out of the Pittsburgh basement. (106–07)

This overt direction to me as reader runs counter to what I have been expecting. The childhood vignette now relates in an unknown way to a story—or description—of Dillard's watching a pair of migrating whistling swans through binoculars as they circle over a pond in Virginia. She follows the swans through the binoculars, rotating as they circle, keeping "the black frame of the lenses around them," and losing her sense of space:

> If I lowered the binoculars I was always amazed to learn in which direction I faced—dazed, the way you emerge awed from a movie and try to reconstruct, bit by bit, a real world, in order to discover where in it you might have parked the car. (108)

As she continues to watch the swans, she is suddenly lost in more than space, now in time, in reality, apocalyptically. She looks through reeds translucent as strands of algae and swaying as if under water. Her eyes burn as they had while staring into the magnified seventy-five watt bulb. And the two swans swim into her field of vision, "as fast as rotifers: two whistling swans, infinitesimal, beating their tiny wet wings, perfectly formed" (109). The images overlap in her mind's eye as if she were seeing through a microscope with one eye and through the binoculars with the other open eye. The child and the adult watchers-through-lenses merge, memory with the present: "The twenty years separating the adult from the child are erased. The two experiences are one" (McFadden 775). The boundaries of two realities become co-extensive—even more difficult to sort out than the boundary between the darkened movie theatre and dusky parking lot—ending the world and remaking it fantastically.

"God in the Doorway"

Dillard also conjoins two distinct realities in "God in the Doorway." This piece begins with her telling the story of her childhood terror of Santa Claus, whom she equates with God, "an old man you never saw, but who nevertheless saw you; he knew when you'd been bad or good. He knew when you'd been bad or good!" (140). Santa steps through the door of the young Annie's home one Christmas eve, and instead of being delighted, the child recognizes the visit for what it is, a visitation from another realm of existence, a violation of the boundaries of the real. Santa sees you, but you should never see him. He knows you though you never know more of him than his red joviality and gifts or no gifts. Santa enters with a different world at his back:

> Santa Claus stood in the doorway with night over his shoulder, letting in all the cold air of the sky; Santa Claus stood in the doorway monstrous and bright, powerless, ringing a loud bell and repeating Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas. (140)

Santa's appearance is no less shocking than a visitation from God in the flesh would be, which is the point that the adult Dillard draws from the experience. Santa belongs in a different realm—a realm of imagination and of supernatural power—and when he steps into the child's world, two worlds intersect for the child: imaginative and real worlds come together frighteningly and cataclysmically. Not only does he bring his awesome power (the dread withholding of gifts), but he is also strangely diminished in our everyday world—an equally frightening circumstance, for what happens to the stability of reality when one encounters a powerless Santa, one you can see, one you can avoid?

Dillard's memory conflates this incident with another image, bringing two worlds together across time as in "Lenses," so that her adult mind confuses Miss White, the loving and friendly neighbor lady who incarnated Santa that Christmas, with Santa Claus, the being from a different realm, and with God, making of the three "an awesome, vulnerable trinity" (140). And so, she informs the reader, "This is really a story about

Miss White." The child's mind has connected God and Santa analogically; the adult's mind, rather than rationalizing away the reality of either or both, compounds the image further, compounding also the fearfulness of each. Dillard also remembers Miss White for her demonstration of the wonder of magnified, focused light; unfortunately she used the child's hand as target. Now the adult fears the presence in the world of this fearful, powerful love. As she summarizes, "So once in Israel love came to us incarnate, stood in the doorway between two worlds, and we were all afraid" (141). Christ meets and does not meet our expectations: we expect awesomeness, not vulnerability. His presence shakes Dillard's carefully constructed views of reality. As she puts it elsewhere, in the light of the incarnation, "All those things / which were thought to be questions / are no longer important" (*TPW* 125).[46]

This incarnate presence is not merely metaphoric or symbolic for Dillard. Rather, the shockingness of Santa-ic visitation defamiliarizes the incarnation of God, the intrusion of the "awesome, vulnerable" Christ into the sublunar sphere, reinvesting the event with some of its presumed original power. Currently, the image has about the strikingness of a Christmas card photograph, "pretty and sensible," "of the angel of the Lord, the glory of the Lord, and a multitude of the heavenly host," which will not make the shepherds sore afraid should they see it in a Hallmark shop (*Teaching* 95).[47] The presence of God in the world is as real to the adult Dillard as the presence of Santa in the doorway is to the child; both are abrupt violations of boundaries. Dillard's "coelescing"[48] of two images heightens the reality of the imaginative, the divine and the everyday worlds and reinvests their conjunctions with significance and power sufficient to challenge the reader's own expectations about reality. Two worlds overlap when the incarnation opens the door between them. Such a conjunction of disparate realities has the power to awaken anyone who experiences it to both sets of realities—to the conditions.

"An Expedition to the Pole"

"An Expedition to the Pole," the collection's longest essay and its masterpiece, also employs a conjunction of essay-like realistic description, narration and reflection with the unexpected fantastic to encourage its readers to broaden their range of expectations for "reality." Ronda argues that Dillard's technique in this piece is similar to the Metaphysical poet's *discordia concors*,[49] using "Dialogues among self and others, self and God, self and nature [to] generate rich possibilities that go beyond the individualism and subjectivity" which he finds in *Living by Fiction* (1065). I believe, however, that the significant dialogue or dialectic relationship in "Expedition" is between two realms, the material and the spiritual, and that it is the juxtaposition of these realms which takes the reader beyond his limited and limiting expectations, just as the events which Dillard depicts realistically and fantastically take her into a broader reality. In order to achieve this result, Dillard must establish the essay and its realistic mode of discourse before introducing the fantastic. To do so, she uses personal narrative and historical fact, creating an analogy between the topics of each, and overtly offering her reflections on and interpretations of this material; all of these are elements typical of the essay, and when used together, strongly suggest that "Expedition" is nonfictional and its subject matter "real."

Narration, broadly speaking, is a mode of the essay common enough to be accorded its own subgeneric pigeonhole.[50] Dillard emphasizes her essay's narrative elements: she told Weber, "I don't reflect. I don't meditate. I write *narrative*" (67). Several pieces in *Teaching* begin with narratives, so I am not surprised when Dillard begins "Expedition" with a scene-setting description: "There is a singing group in this Catholic church today, a singing group which calls itself 'Wildflowers'" (17). The narrator's participation in this scene is not overt at first, but is implied by the use of the present tense in the narration and by the temporal and spatial deictics "this" and "today." The first of the three main sections of "Expedition" is divided into thirteen subsections, entitled, alternatingly (but without pattern), "The People," "The Land" and "The Technology."[51] In the first ten of those subsections (which comprise nearly half the essay), those entitled "The People" contain narrative vignettes of the Mass the narrator is attending. In these, the story develops in time and space, the depth of the temporal realm filled out by analeptic memories and forward progression through the Mass, and the spatial sphere sketched in with descriptive detail about the church-goers.

The essayist intrudes into her narrative in the third paragraph of the introductory subsection to take her place on stage and to set the conceptual scene for the piece. She considers the presence of the Wildflowers in the service "a pity at first, for I have overcome a fiercely anti-Catholic upbringing in order to attend Mass simply and solely to escape Protestant guitars [like Wildflowers']. Why am I here?" (18). This comment establishes the narrator's personal participation in the scene and also begins to develop the topic under consideration. She has a taste for the sublime, which she admits is "a greed like any other," that she cannot reconcile with the secularism and poor taste she finds in church. She does "not pretend to understand," furthermore, how "these people—all the people in all the ludicrous churches—have access to the land" (18), proleptically alluding to the ground of the analogy that will structure the essay. This personal, reflective presence creates the "impression of [the] strong or at least interesting character" that Epstein gives as one of the defining qualities of the essay (400). Gass expresses the centrality of this presence when he calls the essayist "the hero of the essay," who depicts herself "in the act of thinking things out, feeling and finding the way; [the essay] is the mind in the marvels and miseries of its makings, in the work of the imagination, the search for form" (19–20). This kind of presence is created through tone and especially through the narrator's comments and represented cogitation. The essayist's first comments in "Expedition" , seemingly addressed directly to her reader, refer to the disjunction she experiences between her desire for the sublime and what she actually encounters in church: "Who gave these nice Catholics guitars?... What is the Pope thinking of?" (18). In the following sections of personal narration, she annotates her own experience in church, noting absurdities such as the "rascally acolyte's" having lit the two Advent candles before the priest has introduced him, the priest's own banal comments in the middle of the prayer and her pew-neighbor's response during the passing of the peace: "'Peace be with you,' and he said, '*Yeah*'" (23). From these incidents, she concludes:

> A high school stage play is more polished than this service we have been rehearsing since the year one. In two thousand years, we have not worked out the kinks. We positively glorify them. Week after week we witness the same miracle: that God is so mighty he can stifle his own laughter. (20)

The occasion of the essay, then, is the essayist's attempt to reconcile this ignobility, this lack of dignity in her fellow searchers with her expectations. Her overt "search for form," together with the first-person narration, creates a strong sense in the reader of the presence of a real person, dealing veraciously with actual events and materials; it establishes, that is, the pieces as realistic and nonfictional.

Dillard intersperses accounts of nineteenth and early-twentieth century polar exploration between these subsections of personal narrative. In subsections entitled "The Land" and "The Technology," she describes how ludicrously unprepared early polar explorers were for the brutal conditions of the polar regions. The Franklin expedition "was adapted only to conditions in the Royal Navy officers' clubs in England. The Franklin expedition stood on its dignity" (24). Essays regularly offer factual information like that which Dillard provides in these historical vignettes. And readers routinely accept such material as nonfictional and true, assuming it could be verified if one so wished. The good faith which underwrites the essay's contract with its reader is symbolized by the absence of footnotes: the reader simply takes the essayist's word for it.[52] The authors of the nineteenth century narratives from which Dillard draws her information apparently could not assume that their audiences would believe their accounts of fabulous landscapes and bizarre events: one, whom Dillard quotes, asserts, "These incidents are *true* … these scenes are *real*" (44). However, in Dillard's essay, the perceived confirmability of the historical information, in tandem with the assumed truth of the personal narrative vignettes, strengthens the reader's sense of "Expedition" as nonfictional and realistic.

The narrator/essayist also comments on the polar narratives, wondering aloud,[53] for instance, after reading some of their personal accounts, whether "polar explorers were not somehow chosen for the empty and solemn splendor of their prose styles" (22). In particular, she calls attention to their failure to forego their own dignity in order to save their lives. This commentary is common ground for the essayist to tread, since an essay's readers want more than the facts, which any encyclopedia or even, perhaps, their own eyes can provide. They want to know what Dillard thinks about her own experience or about polar exploration, what kind of conclusions she draws from her material, what she thinks it means. The essayist's opinions are precisely the thing that communicates the "strong or at least interesting character." And as the essayist begins to emerge from her text, I get a sense of a real person relating true things.

The structure which an essayist imposes on her subject matter is an implicit form of comment. Dillard structures "Expedition" as an analogy between her activity in church and these early, dignified polar expeditions. In the second subsection of "Expedition," entitled "The Land," she explicitly defines the terms of this analogy. The goal for polar explorers is the Pole of Relative Inaccessibility, "that imaginary point on the Arctic Ocean farthest from land in any direction … contrived to console" explorers after the North Pole was finally achieved (18). And for the spiritual searcher, "The Absolute is the Pole of Relative Inaccessibility located in metaphysics.… It is the point of spirit farthest from every accessible point of spirit in all directions. Like the others, it is a Pole of the

Most Trouble. It is also—I take this as given—the pole of great price" (19).[54] The equivocation on "land" here is the fulcrum of the analogy: "The land" is the context within which one acts out the search for the sublime. The regions of spirit—"lands" by metaphoric extension—in which one seeks the Absolute are like the polar regions. Dillard says that for her, Eskimos "and the spare landscape in which they live [are] an emblem for the barren landscape of the soul: the soul's deliberate preparation for the incursions of the Divine" (qtd. in Hammond 32).

The connections between the analogues are at first drawn explicitly. But as the essay progresses, Dillard increasingly relies on the energy generated by the contrapuntal arrangement of the sections of personal and historical narrative to evoke in the reader the generalized comparison. For example, the eighth subsection, "The Land," describes the irrational sacrifices of fuel and other seeming-necessities that over-wintering expeditions made in favor of dignity-preserving libraries, backgammon boards and sterling silverware. Dillard explains in the following section that,

> God does not demand that we give up our personal dignity, that we throw in our lot with random people, that we lose ourselves and turn from all that is not him. God needs nothing, asks nothing, and demands nothing, like the stars. (31)

Or like the Arctic, I conclude, by obvious, analogical inference. "It is a life with God [or in the Arctic] which demands these things." The fact that this subsection describing the metaphysical ground of the search is also titled "The Land," the only time in the essay that two consecutive sections bear the same heading, makes the analogy explicit.

At the beginning of "Expedition," the physical, polar arena was established as the fundamental unit in the analogical pair, the spiritual search being described in terms of the physical. Even the essayist's assertion in the first paragraphs, that all the people have access to the land, locates the spiritual search in physical terms. The Pole of Relative Inaccessibility, the "navigator's paper point" (18),[55] was extended to the spiritual realm.

In this section though, because one must reach backward to the previous section to draw out the analogy, the spiritual ground of "a life with God" becomes fundamental. The high Arctic is like life with God. Polar explorations become analogous to spiritual, rather than the other way around. It seems here that the categories Dillard established early in the essay are beginning to merge as the analogical connection between them becomes stronger.

Dunn claims that Dillard's view of reality, and specifically, her Christianity, "is based on the logic of metaphor—the ability to perceive similarity between dissimilarities…—rather than on the logic of the syllogism or of systematic theology" (Dunn 24). Dillard uses metaphor in this piece to "understand and structure one domain of experience in terms of another domain of a different kind" (Mark Johnson 15).[56] Metaphor works within realistic discourse, such as the essay, to suggest a novel way of perceiving some element of reality. Early in "Expedition," when Dillard claims that "Every Sunday for a year I have run away from home and joined the circus as a dancing bear" (19), I do not take her literally, even though the piece has established itself as nonfiction. I do not regard her as making an absurd claim about reality, only as expressing a personal association called up by the restless antics of this particular ludicrous instantiation of the Mass. Dillard's metaphoric attribution of dancing-bear-ness to church-goers is commentary, but less easily formalized than the explicit conclusion stated as comparison later in the same section, that church is often more amateurish than a high school play. Additionally, though metaphor works across domains, it also reinforces the boundaries of the realms it brings together, seemingly affirming the aptness of each of its referents to its proper domain: the comparison would not be enlightening if the realms were not distinct.

In her introduction to *The Best American Essays, 1988*, Dillard claims that

> The essay may deal in metaphor better than the poem can, in some ways, because prose may expand what the lyric poem must

> compress. Instead of confining a metaphor to half a line, the essayist can devote to it a narrative, descriptive, or reflective couple of pages, and bring forth vividly its meanings. (xvii)

In the last three subsections of the first section of the essay, Dillard's metaphors begin to expand into the space that nonfiction creates for them. As these metaphors expand, the realms they encompass seem less distinct and their elements harder to categorize. In the briefly extended metaphor describing church-goers as dancing bears, the vehicle is easily distinguished from the tenor. In the essayist's description of the Sanctus, however, the ground of the metaphor becomes a bit more unstable:

> It is here, if ever, that one loses oneself at sea. Here, one's eyes roll up, and the sun rolls overhead, and the floe rolls underfoot, and the scene of unrelieved ice and sea rolls over the planet's pole and over the world's rim wide and unseen. (32)

These sentences revivify and then expand on a dead metaphor, being "lost at sea," one particularly relevant to the specific ground of Dillard's analogy between physical and metaphysical. But where is this "Here"? Is it this particular point in the temporal progression of the Mass? She is certainly relating her experience of the Sanctus. Or is it the spatial here of the story, the Catholic church? These interpretations are possible, but the image is of those polar reaches of the physical search. And this suggests the analogous spiritual search, the one that we adapt to for the sake of our life in the vicinity of God, not for God's sake. The "here" of the Sanctus is the here of the spiritual search; and that search has become, metaphorically speaking, a polar search. As the analogy between spiritual and physical realities gains momentum at this point in the essay, the connections between the analogues strengthen from the "x is similar to y" or "x is like/as y" of analogy and simile into the "x is y" identity of metaphor. The polar search is a spiritual search; spiritual exploration occurs in the physical world.

But this is still "just" a metaphor. The spatio-temporal "here" reconverges with the present of narration with the first word of the next paragraph, and we are again in the middle of a farcical but very real Mass:[57] "Now, just as we are … about to utter the words of the Sanctus, the lead singer of Wildflowers bursts on-stage.… Alas, alack, oh brother, we are going to have to *sing* the Sanctus" to the accompaniment of the absurd Protestant guitars.[58] This world of the church-going religious search is described in a realistic mode again for two paragraphs, before it unexpectedly and decisively opens out into the realm of its former analogue:

> Must I join this song? May I keep only my silver? My backgammon board, I agree, is frivolity. I relinquish it. I will leave it right here on the ice. But my silver? My family crest? One knife, one fork, one spoon, to carry beneath the glance of heaven and back?… We are singing the Sanctus, it seems, and they are passing the plate. I would rather, I think, undergo the famous dark night of the soul than encounter in church the dread hootenanny—but these personal preferences are of no account, and maladaptive to boot. They are passing the plate and I toss in my schooling; I toss in my rank in the Royal Navy, my erroneous and incomplete charts, my pious refusal to eat sled dogs, my watch, my keys, and my shoes.… [W]ho can argue with conditions?
>
> "Heaven and earth earth earth earth earth," we sing.… Unaccountably, the enormous teen-aged soprano catches my eye, exultant. A low shudder or shock crosses our floe. We have split from the pack; we have crossed the Arctic Circle, and the current has us. (33–34)

Nothing in the narrator's tone suggests that there is anything unusual about this scene.[59] With this intrusion of the fantastic, it is no longer clear which of the terms of the comparison is more basic: these two incompatible realms are somehow both real, their boundaries overlapping.

Dillard previously scorned most of the items mentioned in this quotation as hindrances to actual polar expeditions, as evidence of the dignified failure to adapt to conditions. Suddenly she finds herself weighted down with them, walking the ice exploring; she discovers how unprepared for the conditions she is. She is, however, still in a church service which remains the here and now of the narration. That reality is no more real, though, than the polar, imagined one: "We are singing the Sanctus, *it seems*...." She finds herself carrying items properly belonging to both domains. Silverware, a backgammon board, Royal Navy rank, charts, scruples about eating dogs are all impediments polar explorers have carried with them, which she has reported as factual information in the essay—all these she tosses into the offering plate. Taken together, they now serve as a symbol of maladaptive personal preference, expectations needing to be purged. Schooling, watch, keys and shoes, on the other hand, she has not mentioned. We must assume that these actual things are more personal symbols of her own maladaptive preferences. All these she tosses into the offering plate—in a manner reminiscent of revival meeting offerings, where people have been known to give even wedding bands—as sacrifices made for herself, for her life with God. She sets aside her preferences in light of the conditions. So she is tossing out her dignity, symbolically speaking. Here the "merely" metaphoric becomes fantastic, magically real. It is no longer clear which realm, which of the former analogues is more real, which of them forms the understood ground from which the other domain is meaningfully structured or interpreted. Concrete polar search and abstract spiritual search become grounded in one fantastic, inclusive and magical reality.

The next subsection, "The Land," does not return to the historical detail that I have come to expect from these sections: there is no change in time or characters, and setting is still the curious mixture of icescape and church. It continues narrating the real Mass impossibly occurring on an ice floe. The formerly distinct analogues have somehow merged, but the boundary between them does not disappear entirely, or at least, not yet. In these first pages of magic realist narration, the essayist switches back and forth between realistic and magically real modes of discourse as easily as she did earlier between the distinct historical and personal narratives. After an extended section of fantastic events, in which she swims in the Arctic ocean without ill effect, plays Frisbee on an ice floe and sees some clowns—suspiciously priest-like—making human pyramids and doing gymnastics, she brings me back to reality, as I think I know it: "Now the music ceases and we take our seats in the pews. A baby is going to be baptized" (35). "Now" once again recollects us to reality. "The music ceases" makes one think, perhaps, that this whole improbable string of events has been transpiring in Dillard's imagination while she sings, against her will and scruples, the Sanctus. However, this sensible and somewhat comforting interpretation is overturned almost immediately when Dillard describes the setting again: "Overhead the sky is brightening; I do not know if this means we have drifted farther north, or all night" (35–36).

The next subsection plays the same trick. It describes, realistically, baby Oswaldo and the scene around the font, but everyone is "standing on the ice between the first row of pews and the linoleum-floored sacristy" (36). Dillard—for I still feel it is "really" her, essayist and narrator—keeps her own bare feet on the prie-dieu, "to keep those feet from playing on the ice during the ceremony" (she has tossed her shoes into the offering, remember, as unsuitable for the conditions and perhaps in order to stand on the newly holy ground/ice). These rapid, unexpected shifts from the real to the fantastic keep me off-balance, so that I walk as carefully through the text as I might on one of the tiny, tippy ice flows which now form the physical setting. I can no longer trust my expectations about nonfiction, nor about the categories that Dillard earlier established. I certainly do not expect to find this kind of fantastic, imaginative narrative in nonfiction. By briefly re-evoking the nonfictional mode that has prevailed for most of the essay, Dillard strengthens it, and keeps the realism from being totally usurped by the fantastic. As Slemon describes the similar technique in magic realist fiction, "The fantastic element … never quite manages to dominate an undercurrent of realism" (11), and here Dillard seems to be consciously seeking this effect. The effect on me as reader is to make me willing to accept both the fantastic and the realistic as "real." I do not question the veracity of the previous sections of personal and historical nonfictional description and narration; instead I accommodate the fantastic within the real.

Slemon claims that in response to the unremarked fantastic in fiction,[60]

> the reader is pulled away from a tendency to neutralize the fantastic elements of the story within the general code of narrative realism and begins to read the work as being more closely aligned with the fantastic. Yet a complete transference from one mode to the other never takes place, and the novel remains suspended between the two. (11)

In "Expedition," a similar effect is at work. The fantastic elements of Dillard's personal narrative do not make me question the truth of what I have already read. I do not doubt that Dillard was at such a Mass, or that the historical facts she reports are true. And although I may try to find a way to explain realistically the fantastic—"it was a dream" (i.e., an actually occurring dream) or "she imagined it" (i.e., it represents images she really saw in her mind's eye)—I do not disbelieve the magically real narrative; that is, I am willing to accept that the magically real world the piece creates is a coherent nonfictional world.[61]

When the primary mode of "Expedition" was analogy, I expected surreally metaphoric sections to give way to realism after a sentence or two (since I seem to have a definite expectation about how long a metaphor should last in nonfiction). Now however, the repeated and rapid cuts from magic realism to realism eventually make me expect the fantastic to emerge from the real at any moment. Magic "reality" has become as stable and basic as the previously more "real" world of church-going. Thus, during the relatively long section of realistic, nonfictional narration relating baby Oswaldo's baptism, I am expecting the reappearance of the fantastic. It appears several times explicitly: Dillard spots a polar bear in the distance during the ritual, for instance. But now I also see some of the presumably real details as fantastic. The child's parents and godparents seem oddly real. Oswaldo wears "blue tennis shoes with white rubber toes, and red socks" (36), which are strangely inappropriate under the lace baptismal gown. After the baptism, his mother wraps a towel around his head, "so that he looks, proudly, as though he has just been made a swami" (37), an odd image for a Christian rite. The final absurdity, absurdly inappropriate now that I am querying reality for the surreal, is the round of applause at the end of the christening.[62]

So, in sum, I credit the historical information as referentially true, within reasonable levels of verifiability; I also believe that the personal narrative depicts an internally coherent and referentially true nonfictional world; furthermore, I subscribe to the fictional, fantastic world as coherent and viably connected with the real world. Obviously, these opinions are not logically compatible. I have adopted what Pavel calls a "doubly articulated ontology," which perceives reality as "containing two frames of reference that are as distinct as possible, though closely related" (58). Pavel, though, describes the spiritually-real world as the base for the physical, secondary world in the religious mind (57), while in Dillard's magic realism, there is no hierarchy of worlds. For the piece to work as magic realism, she must first establish a nonfictional realism; however, once the fantastic begins to gain prominence, realism begins to lose its primacy. Slemon says that in magic realist fiction, the

> two separate modes [of discourse] never manage to arrange themselves into any kind of hierarchy … neither managing to subordinate or contain the other. This sustained opposition forestalls the possibility of interpretive closure through any act of naturalizing the text to an established system of representation. (11–12)

The "gaps, absences, and silences" that he says this juxtaposition creates are less important to the reader than to the critic, I would claim. The reader attempts to integrate what he reads and seems able to hold the worlds in a happy tension, imputing reality to both, filling in—perhaps without even noticing—the impossible links and gaps between and in the worlds with his own credulity. I have come to accept, within the confines of the text at least, a broader view of "the conditions," one in which the material and the spiritual are both part of a coextensive reality.

The second and third major sections of the essay return again to nonfictional modes of discourse, prior to the final extended passage of magically realistic narration. "The Land" in Section II describes some of the notable failures of Arctic exploration, "The People" the insensibility of Christians to the conditions of the spiritual search in the physical world:

> On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it?… It is madness to wear ladies' straw and velvet hats to church; we should all wear crash helmets. (40)

In a section called "Assorted Wildlife," Dillard returns to analogy as a mode of analysis. This time, the comparison is between unmindful spiritual seekers and, their counterparts from nature, mindless wasps and cute penguins:

> The penguins are adorable, and the wasp at the stained-glass window is adorable, because in each case their impersonations of human dignity so evidently fail. What are the chances that God finds our failed impersonations of human dignity adorable? (42)

Section III begins with a "The Land" section in which Dillard returns to the polar regions, this time recounting her own experience in the north. Here again, personal and polar narrative merge, but this time it is in wholly credible nonfiction: "Several years ago

I visited the high Arctic and saw it: the Arctic Ocean, the Beaufort Sea. The place was Barter Island, inside the Arctic Circle…" (42). The strength of the impulse to read credulously, that is, assuming reality, and the power of the first-person narrative voice is evident when I am willing to take this narration as true even after all the upheavals of the magical into the real in the past few pages. Though Dillard reports apparently real events and facts realistically, the Arctic reality she saw and reports is itself surreal. What she sees is "a pile of colored stripes," which she assumes to be sky, ice, sea. She is unable to differentiate between them.

> If I loosed my eyes from my shoes, the gravel at my feet, or the chaos of ice at the shore, I saw what newborn babies must see: nothing but senseless variations of light on the retinas.… There was, in short, no recognizable three-dimensional space in the Arctic. There was also no time. (43)

The Arctic land and seascape loosens the blinders of expectations from her eyes. "The mind expects the usual" ("Mirages," *TST* 144), but in the Arctic, reality does not give the mind what it expects, so that Dillard is able to see the surreality of reality. Because she expects to see more than simply "what our categories tell us is real," she is able to see "the unexpected reality that does not fit our constructed version of the world" (Ross-Bryant 68). The event itself becomes surreal in memory and in report, though I can still take it as factual: "When I woke I walked out in the colorless stripes and the revolving winds, where atmosphere mingled with distance, and where land, ice, and light blurred into a dreamy, freezing vapor" (44).

Though she continues in the nonfictional mode of discourse in the next sections, her points become more private, harder to interpret, the analogies less explicit. She acknowledges her personal involvement in the spiritual search, stating that "It is for the Pole of Relative Inaccessibility I am searching, and have been searching, in the mountains and along the seacoasts for years" (44), and I am reminded of her previous dispatches from her sojourns in the Blue Mountains of Virginia, recorded in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*,[63] and in Puget Sound (*Holy the Firm* and "Mirages" for instance). She states factually that "Polar exploration is no longer the fashion it was during the time of the Franklin expedition.... Our attention is elsewhere now, but the light-soaked land still exists; I have seen it" (44–45). But she is not simply referring to the Arctic; she refers to the sublime spiritual reaches as well, so that this essay-like comment no longer applies only to its immediate context. She also refers to both realities when she summarizes a discussion of John Murray's deduction of Antarctica solely from the evidence of dredgings and soundings: "Deduction, then, is possible—though no longer the fashion" (45). Though the spiritual search is no longer fashionable, Dillard is a such a seeker, recording in "Expedition," and elsewhere in *Teaching*, some of her own dredgings and deductions, and doing so in such a way that her readers might take this search seriously, at least for the duration of their reading.

Dillard suggests elsewhere that it is her intention to revivify spiritual reality. In an interview with Yancey, she states, "Just getting the agnostic to acknowledge the supernatural is a major task" (Yancey 959). Of the current state of spiritual awareness, Dillard says: "Once again Gnosticism prevails in the West, but this time the creed is reversed. We are newly 'in the know,' and what we 'know' is that no spiritual order or realm obtains whatever, and no god lives" ("Winter Melons" 89). In *Living by Fiction*, she describes the "progress" Western civilization has made from the gnostic regarding of the spiritual as the only realm of reality and truth ("We know that in the past men believed in miracles, and thought the world was flat.... Oh, they were a credulous bunch back then" ["Winter Melons" 89]) to denying utterly the meaningfulness of metaphysical explorations into the other-than-physical. In her eyes, science and institutional Christianity[64] have created a system within which "the function of ... knowledge is to '*de-spookify*,'" to desacralize nature and experience, to "unhing[e] materials from meaning" (*LF* 136; italics added). The result is that we live in a world in which God is silent—or rather, has been silenced.

> We have drained the light from the boughs in the sacred grove and snuffed it in the high places and along the banks of the sacred streams. We as a people have moved from pantheism to pan-atheism. Silence [nature's and God's] is not our heritage but our destiny; we live where we want to live" (*TST* 69)

—namely, in a world without God. In Dillard's view, we see what we choose to see in this world. This, in other words, is the reality we have chosen, not the one dictated to us by any kind of reality but the one we wish to perceive. With our logical positivistic bent, we demand a strict criterion of verifiability or experimental confirmability about statements purporting to describe reality. However, the observation demanded is observation in a very limited sense of the word: it is looking for the expected.

Slemon describes magic realist fiction as a voice from the political fringes of post-colonial culture, one which "can be seen to provide a positive and liberating response to the codes of imperial history and its legacy of fragmentation and discontinuity"; these texts, he says, "implicitly suggest that enabling strategies for the future require revisioning" of the cultural and language codes of the colonizers "in a complex and imaginative double-think" which incorporates as a whole the binary oppositions resulting from colonization (21). In *Teaching*, Dillard's magic realist essays are her response to what she sees as a materialist imperialism of perception. McFadden comments that "There is nothing surrealistic about [Dillard's visions of reality in *Teaching*]. The present age is simply too literal-minded to accept the mystic vision" (773),[65] but while she has a good sense of Dillard's view of "the present age," she seems to miss the point slightly, for Dillard's effort is to teach her audience to see in new ways and she does so precisely by surrealistically juxtaposing competing realities.

Dillard's goal in *Teaching* is to *re*-spookify reality. This is not, however, merely to reestablish the primitive condition in which all nature is invested with meaning. That effort would only be to replace one set of totalizing expectations with another, again dictating "reality." Instead, she is trying to force her readers to see what is out there, whatever that is, to bear witness. Describing Dillard's aim, Peterson says that she thinks "Our necessary and proper work" in our willfully sightless modern society "is witness—like the *palo santo* trees. Out in the open, in our desacralized and much-studied … world, [to be] perfect witnesses, watching, mute, and waving our arms, calling the world's attention to what is" (189).

It is evident in *Teaching*, as it is in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and *Holy the Firm*, that Dillard believes in the possibility that there are "real" things which our assumptions about reality prevent us from seeing. Though her reality seems to include the Christian God, for instance, she does not force this vision on her readers as anything more than her point of view.[66] As Becker puts it, "Dillard's is not an effort to force faith by proving that everything makes sense" (411). But her reality does include the possibility of meaningfulness. She says, for instance, that "The pertinent notion in *Holy the Firm* is the possibility of meaning. If you assume that there is a God, for instance, you are also assuming that history has meaning—that the universe has meaning, that time has meaning" (qtd. in Hammond 35). In *The Writing Life* she asks, "Why are we reading if not in the hope that the writer will magnify and dramatize our days, will illuminate and inspire us with wisdom, courage, and the possibility of meaningfulness?" (72–73). The unresolved and unresolvable dialectic depicted in "Expedition" does not pin down a simple meaning; rather it tends to broaden what the reader is willing to accept as meaningful.

Dillard's magic realist essays work toward this "re-spookification" by showing the reader someone—the essayist—seeing a bigger reality, someone seeing in new ways. Dunn describes her similar effort in *Holy the Firm*:

> facing agnostic readers, [Dillard] can not assume that others will automatically share her basic beliefs; nor will she, as an artist rather than a theologian, employ theological or biblical arguments to compel belief.…[Instead,] the credibility of her vision rests … on her ability to persuade her readers that she has looked closely and thoughtfully at the world. (17)

Dunn argues that tone is her most significant technique for achieving this effect. In "Expedition," by convincing the reader of her own reality and sanity, and by creating the sense of her presence in the text, Dillard prepares the reader to accept her vision of reality, which in the end, she simply asserts: of the "light-soaked land" she simply states "I have seen it" (*Teaching* 45). And this is the mode of evidence in the last pages of "Expedition." Many sentences in the remaining pages begin with the simple construction, "I have …" or "I [present tense verb] [object/preposition]": "I have, I say, set out again" (47) "I have a taste for solitude, and silence, and for what Plotinus called 'the flight of the alone to the Alone.' I have a taste for solitude"; "I have put on silence and waiting. I have quit my ship.… I walk in emptiness; I hear my breath. I see my hand.…" (48). This very simple mode of narration, though magically real, has the direct and personal force of sincere speech. It convinces readers that Dillard has seen her light-soaked land and that we may see it in her report, if we have allowed her to help us to see.

Her method in *Teaching* fits Thomas Browne's prescription: quoting him, she says, "it is valuable to lose ourselves in mystery, 'for by acquainting our reason with how unable it is to display the visible and obvious effects of nature, it becomes more humble and submissive unto the subtilties of faith'" ("Winter Melons" 89). The magic realist essay is one of her tools for effecting the potential "re-spookification" of reality, for forcing her readers to lose themselves in mystery: by getting her readers to accept the dual realities of the magic realist essay, she has got them "well on their way to accepting the terms of religious experience" (Anderson on Chesterton, "Hearsay Evidence" 302).

Matiko says of *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, "I cannot think of another collection of modern pieces that so fully embodies in both form and content the sense of striving [to which 'essay' attests], a striving which approaches, as this particular title suggests, even the impossible" (89). Throughout *Teaching*, Dillard strives, quests or sojourns, attempting to find meaning in her reality. She also seeks to equip her readers to interact openly with their world and to challenge them to be willing to see reality in unexpected ways. She does so by challenging them to interact with her texts. In Dillard's world view, learning to unexpect the expected creates an ability to perceive "the conditions," the aspects of reality which, when noticed and faced, suggest to man that he is a sojourner.

CHAPTER THREE

The Life of the Spirit: Sojourning in *The Living*

In her essay, "Sojourners," Dillard laments the inhospitality of this world, where "It doesn't seem … we belong, here where … we're all going to die…. It is not, frankly, the sort of home for people one would have thought of—although I lack the fancy to imagine another" (*TST* 151). She does not, however, lack the fancy to imagine the possibilities for meaning inherent in this world. And she does not lack the fancy to represent imaginatively this unfriendly world and its possibilities. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Dillard uses her nonfiction to make her readers aware of sets of expectations which limit their awareness of the conditions in which they live their lives.

Dillard's first novel, *The Living*, stands as her treatment in fiction of these same issues. In it she evokes a world similar to the one depicted in her essays, a realm in which characters struggle to integrate their experience of life's difficult realities with their desire for meaning. *The Living*, that is, depicts man as a physical and spiritual sojourner. This novel has provoked widely varying responses from critics. Some see it as plotless and actionless while some have complained about a sense of emotional distance in the narrator's portrayal of her characters. Other critics rave about Dillard's treatment of these same aspects, several describing it as a spiritually enlightening novel. These divergent readings seem to focus around the enigmatic tone of the novel. What is the narrator's attitude toward her characters and their world? I believe that the answer to this question is that the narrator is a sojourner like her characters, and that she has reached a kind of spiritual level in this sojourn, what I will describe later in this paper as the life of the spirit.

Before discussing the narrator's enigmatic tone, it is necessary to describe Dillard's depiction of man as sojourner in the novel. In the first section of this chapter I will examine her narrative technique, focusing on the methods Dillard uses to draw her reader into the harsh fictional world of the novel and arguing that much of the novel's narrative energy is directed toward evoking death as the vivid boundary condition of the fictional world. In the second section, I will establish the tripartite phenomenology of spirit Dillard seems to be developing in the novel. I will examine the main character's search for meaning within the realm delimited by death. Clare Fishburn passes through the life of the senses and the life of the mind before achieving a livable compromise between his attempts to find meaning and the incomprehensible material conditions of that search in the life of the spirit. Though Dillard directly refers only to the life of sensation in the novel, this system is alluded to in other Dillard texts. Most significantly, it appears in an autograph outline to the short story on which the novel is based, where it seems to provide the concealed substructure for the narrative. This system of three modes of life provides, I will argue, a framework for understanding the attempts of the novel's characters to forge meaning within the conditions of their lives. Finally, in the third section, I will return to the issue of tone, the narrator's relationship to her characters and the fictional world. I will deal with the criticism of the novel to date and argue that in the novel Dillard is attempting to depict the conditions of life in the fictional world and her sojourning characters in a manner that is consistent with her aesthetic of sojourning. The novel's enigmatic tone draws the reader not only into the fictional world but also into a mode of viewing reality and as such it is perhaps the novel's strongest rhetorical technique for Dillard's fictional handling of the aesthetic of sojourning.

Atmospheric Pressure: Vivifying Death

In order to depict effectively her character's attempts to find meaning, Dillard must first create a world in which the conditions are realistic and demand attention. Much of her effort in *The Living*, especially in the first three of its seven books, is directed, therefore, toward the creation of an evocative atmosphere. Dillard has called the short story from which the novel grew "heavily atmospheric and serious" (qtd. in Hammond 33);[67] while the novel's mood is somewhat lighter, it is equally weighty in atmosphere. Keneally notices this emphasis:

> At first the reader might think that the celebration of the setting is the most important part of the book, that this is to be a hymn to the peculiar frontier passages, enthusiasms and griefs of the community of Whatcom on Bellingham Bay. (62)[68]

Wesley Kort argues that narrative always addresses the mysteries of human existence, and that it does so at four foci, the four elements of narrative: plot, character, tone and atmosphere. Each of these elements probes an aspect of human existence which demands examination, but which must finally be deferred to as mysterious. Atmosphere he characterizes as the element which addresses the mysteries of man's relationship to the conditions and boundaries of his existence, addressing questions like: "What are the limits of human life?" "What can be expected?" and "What is possible here?" (49, 39).

> Atmosphere ... establishes the boundaries enclosing the narrative's world. These limits are secured by the sense of what might be expected to occur, or what is and what is not possible.... In addition to determining the boundaries of what is possible, atmosphere establishes the conditions affecting the narrative world, whether negatively or positively. Atmosphere is, therefore, tied to "setting," but it is a more inclusive and more precise term than setting. The time and place of a narrative go a long way toward establishing boundaries and conditions, but two narratives can have similar settings and markedly dissimilar atmospheres. (Kort 17)

Kort also points out that a particular narrative will often direct its energies toward one of the four foci, bending the power of the other three toward it. In *The Living*, Dillard directs more narrative effort toward developing and sustaining the atmosphere than toward plot, tone or character; the other three elements of narrative work together with the novel's atmosphere to create a compelling fictional world and to vivify death as the temporal and physical limit of life. I will focus on Dillard's use of description, language and characterization in my analysis of atmosphere in *The Living*.

Description is the most obvious technique for establishing atmosphere, and Dillard uses detailed descriptions of the physical setting and of the objects and actions of the pioneering life to that end in *The Living*. Molly Gloss comments that

> Dillard—who is noted for her descriptions of landscape in such books as *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and *Teaching a Stone to Talk*—summons a very particular place, with such rich, sensuous detail that the cold, island-dotted waters of Puget Sound, the lowering sky … take on an intense character of their own. (Gloss 1)

The particular time and place is Bellingham Bay on the coast of Washington, between 1855 and 1897. These forty-two years take the town of Whatcom from a primitive settlement of two or three pioneering families and a mill, to a more civilized port town, with a streetcar and electric elevators in its hotel. This world is first shown the reader through the eyes of Ada Fishburn, who with her husband Rooney and sons Clare and Glee have just arrived after six months' journey on the arduous overland road and a week of steaming north in Puget Sound. Standing on the dock which "represented the settlement on Bellingham Bay" (3), Ada looks around at her new world:

> It was the rough edge of the world, where the trees came smack down to the stones. The shore looked to Ada as if the corner of the continent had got torn off right here, sometime near yesterday, and the dark trees kept growing like nothing happened.… God might have created such a plunging shore as this before He thought of making people, and then when He thought of making people, He mercifully softened up the land in the palms of his hands wherever He expected them to live, which did not include here.…
>
> Ada said to herself, "For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." The clouds overhead were still.

> There were no waves. A fish broke the water's sheen. It was not quite raining, but everything was wet. (*Living* 3–5)

In 1872, thirteen year-old John Ireland Sharp accompanies his father on a surveying expedition into the Skagit passes, and the reader gets another description of the ruggedness of the environment.

> They slept on stony ground under squares of canvas, and clouds blew into their beds. The fatal, glittering peaks in every direction brewed storms that jumped canyons and blew through their clothes.... Once during a snowstorm they saw lightning, and heard thunder crack below them.... Dirty snowfields sank into melt pools, whose waters tasted like nails. They watched a white mountain goat fall from a cliff.... John Ireland ate and slept; nighthawks hove overhead. Every day they coursed upended slopes on elk trails beneath crumbling glaciers.... He stared at the pinto's dusty rump as its two pink-edged halves rose and fell when it lifted and set its dumb feet again and again. (52–53)

Descriptions of the activities of life are related with the same eye to vivid detail. The clearing of claims is one of the main occupations of the settlers in the first years at Whatcom.

> Falling the enormous firs was the easy part, if they missed the cabin; it took two good men four or five hours. The hard part was chopping through the same trunk again and again, to make pieces small enough to move with oxen or burn, and then fighting the stumps.... [Rooney] and other settlers did not have land; they had smoking rubble heaped higher than their heads. (16)

Rooney tries to work alone at night, clearing his claim,

> but it was no go.... A single ax swung from the ground did nothing; it just gummed up in the pitchy, foot-thick bark near the ground. Rooney could, however, adze a scaled log by lantern light, so he did. Rooney adzed logs; young Clare held the light. (11)

Years later, Clare shows Eustace Honer how to burn fir trees down instead of sawing them:

> Clare drilled a tunnel low in the fir's trunk, a tunnel only a foot long; he used a one-and-one-half-inch drill bit. He stuck a stick in it. A foot above this hole, he bored another tunnel slantingly to meet it. When the stick twitched, he knew the tunnels met.… Using sticks as tongs, he worked [embers] down the top auger hole; the bottom hole, Eustace saw, acted as a draft.… When Clare left, the first trunk was steaming like a potato. (96)

The world in which these characters look around and work interests the reader with the detail of its entirely foreign reality, but it is the prose with which these descriptions are rendered that brings the fictional world to life. Kingsolver feels that "The novel's strength lies in … the formidably creative use of language that is Annie Dillard's dependable gift" (Kingsolver 692). In *Living by Fiction*, Dillard describes a style of modern prose she calls "plain writing" (115). Classical rhetoric distinguished between high or grand style, medium and low or plain style. Wales describes this plain style as being "close to colloquial speech, us[ing] relatively simple vocabulary and syntax" (Wales 993). This is the effect that Dillard seeks with her prose in *The Living*. Her prose is "above all, clean It is sparing in its use of adjectives and adverbs; it avoids relative clauses and fancy punctuation; it forswears exotic lexicons and attention-getting verbs; it eschews splendid metaphors and cultured allusions"; its main distinction is that it is a prose "without embellishment" (*Living by Fiction* 116, 120). In the novel, she uses a kind of "literary vernacular," a representation of spoken idioms and rhythms. Dillard calls plain prose a useful prose, for it attempts to call attention to the world and not to itself (119). And while aspects of the prose in *The Living* draw the readers' attention, the prose succeeds in creating a sense of the concreteness of the setting and the down-the-earth-ness of the characters.

When Clare's burning trees fall, the result is depicted in prose which fits this description:

> The next day the trees started to fall, one after the other, and shook the earth so the house jumped.... The house rose, and everything in it rose, too—the cherry beds, tables, and carved chairs, the china bowls and silver spoons, the basin and buckets and brassbound trunks, the mirrors, portraits, and hunting scenes on the walls, the flour sack and bluing box and saw set and seed potatoes—they all jumped inside the house, and the house jumped, and everything settled back down just as it had been, mum. (97)

Minta and Eustace's possessions are simply named without comment, one after another, giving a catalogue of the physical equipment of the pioneering life and also depicting the relative wealth which the Honers enjoy. Alliteration, perhaps the simplest of sound patterns, adds a touch of self-conscious irony to the trotting out of all their possessions in the almost epically long parenthetical list. The verbs here manage to be both concrete and figurative: "jumped," "rose," "settled." Though her sentences can be long, built up with parenthetical comments and linked together with semi-colons, they retain the simple directness of speech.

Dillard's figurative language also creates a sense of the concreteness of the harsh environment. In the passages quoted above, the images are unadorned and Dillard restricts the imagery strictly to figures appropriate to the fictional world being portrayed: water tastes like nails, the roughness of the shore is like a torn-off corner. The house jumps "like a loose clapper that slides up and bangs the bell at the fair when you hit the strike plate with a maul" (97). This technique is especially evident in the following change Dillard makes in *The Living* to an image from the short story: Clare remembers seeing Beal "standing still with his jaws open and his lips stretched down like the lips on a tragic mask" ("The Living" 51). This becomes: "... with his jaws open *like a sea lion's* and his lips stretched down like the lips on a *cedar* mask" (*The Living* 186; italics added).

In their aptness to the time and place being represented, these images act as indirect description, contributing to the evocation of atmosphere with both vehicle and tenor.

An old-timey slanginess also enlivens the novel's straightforward descriptive prose. In Ada's perception of Bellingham Bay, the trees don't meet the shore, they come "smack down to the stones"; the corner of the continent "had got" rather than "was" torn off. She sees Clare as "a right big boy for five, long in the leg bones like his father" (3). When forced to hike upstream in a creek, John Ireland says, "It really grinds me" (49). Some of the novel's unusual diction comes from the trade language, Chinook, which the narrator explains, "people spoke on the coast from California to Alaska.... The language comprised only three hundred words, so it was simple to learn; on the other hand, Ada complained, it was difficult to say anything the least bit interesting" (12).[69] When used in the novel, however, Chinook makes even simple statements interesting. Ada and Clare pick up words from their Indian friends: Chowitzit said "he would now die—*melamoose*.... It was *hyas mesachie*—very bad" (24); a person's *itkus* is his gear, a *tyee* is an important man. This unfamiliar idiom is one aspect of the diction that draws attention to itself, the plain prose creating a concrete background from which it can stand out. While this diction is not plain to the reader, it is to the region's vernacular; it is the language that grew out of the time and place in which the novel is set. Dillard uses it as the people's medium for experiencing and describing the conditions of their life, and as such it enhances the integrity and evocativeness of the fictional world.

Repetitive constructions—like those in the quotations above: "...before He thought of making people, and then when He thought of making people..." and the repeated image of the house jumping—lend the prose a sonority, giving it an archaic ring and a richness connoting the fierce fecundity of the land. This technique might derive its archaizing effect from its similarity to the rhythms of King James prose, as when Ada, whose knowledge of scripture is apparent in her frequent quotations and allusions, thinks of her son: "Clare was five … and life suited him very well, and he found his enjoyment" (3). The parallelism in the following sentences achieves the same effect (and also uses an image particularly appropriate to the setting); Clare is thinking about Beal's plot against him:

> If a man believes he will fall a certain tree,… then he will probably fall that tree, and he will not if he does not. If a man believes that your death fits his plans, however obscure, then your death fits his plans, however obscure, and he is the one with the gun.[70] (186)

This example also illustrates another effect Dillard derives with these intentionally redundant constructions. After lulling the reader, these long, repetitive sentences often conclude with an ironic twist or clever, abrupt hook. Again in the description of the falling logs, the house settles back down, "mum": the twinkle in this sentence's eye only enhances the vividness of the description, and the evocation of the fictional world. Dillard's prose style in *The Living* is characterized, then, by its concrete simplicity, its straightforward and apt images, its unusual diction, and its distinctive grammatical constructions. I believe the effect it achieves is described by this statement from *Living by Fiction*: plain prose is used "to build an imaginative world whose parts seem solidly actual and lighted, and to name the multiple aspects of experience one by one, with distance, and also with tenderness and respect" (*LF* 118).

Dillard creates her characters using these same elements of her plain prose. In *Living by Fiction*, she claims that plain writing is also effective for handling

> a certain kind of character—a character who does not belong to the drawing room, but is not meant to be seen as a picturesque rustic. Plain prose can follow such characters intimately, lovingly, even a little ironically, and always with respect.… It is a fictional prose tied to character. (*LF* 118)

The novel's plain prose establishes a kind of background from which the distinctive diction of several of the characters stands out. Ada's particularly slangy idiom has already been noted. The diction used to relate Senator Randall's observations conveys not only something about his character but also his attitude toward what he sees: "He noted [Minta's] acquaintance with the grimy, unearthly Indians swarming over her land, who smelled of rancid fish oil, and whose old women and men had deformed heads ... [and] in whom the black eye of savagery and degradation could easily be detected" (145). Beal's diction is formal, but has the oral awkwardness of vocabulary derived solely from books: when he informs Clare of his designs on his life, he explains, "I have considered it a part of ... justice, to impart this knowledge to you" and beseeches Clare to "Forgive the lateness of the occasion" (183). This contrasts nicely with Clare's diction. He apologizes for being "plumb out of sherry" and thinks that Beal looks "right tickled with himself." Beal informs him that he is going to be killed for reasons "with which you need not concern yourself": "Concern yourself, Clare thought."

The importance of this use of diction to define character is especially clear when passages from the short story are compared to related passages in the novel. In the scene alluded to above, the following changes in Clare's diction have been made: "very carefully" becomes "mighty carefully" and "People said all kinds of things" becomes "... every sort of thing"; vivid, slangy adjectives are added: "*Lunatic* Obenchain" is "*cold-out* crazy" and might do "*almighty* anything" (184, 86). And similar changes bring Beal's diction into harmony with his character: "[Beal] also knew that, *despite these alarms* [added], the man was not yet *ontologically* dead [added]. He *persisted in* [changed from simply "was"] thinking his own thoughts..." (336). His opinion that Clare is "a shrivel of a man" is added to the passage (337). Clare "might think Obenchain was an *inveterate* [changed from "chronic"] liar like one of the Cretans *in the epistle to Titus* [specific reference added]..." (338). Dillard has substantially improved this characterizing technique in *The Living*.

Dillard also uses imagery appropriate to the character through whose eyes an episode is seen. Senator Randall considers Minta's barn "as big as the White House" (144). Almost everything in John Ireland's experience reminds him of something from his classical education: he thinks of a local politician as "a slim, courteous scoundrel like Alcibiades" and giving away two-thirds of an inheritance "would be like cutting half his hair," a reference to Diogenes' way of removing the temptation "to stir abroad among men" (370, 65). Beal throws glowing sticks into the sea, which look "Like star shells shot into the night at Sebastopol," showing his knowledge of the Crimean War, or possibly even of Tolstoy's account of that war. Dillard's characters, then, are very often defined by their use of language, even while the images and language they use are enhancing the atmosphere.

Most of the descriptive passages are filtered through a character's eyes and experience. These filtered descriptions also simultaneously create a sense of character and atmosphere. This interaction between character and atmosphere (in Kort's particular sense) works on two levels. First, as pioneers sojourning in a realistic, historical world, the inhabitants of Whatcom are defined by their physical environment. Rooney, for example, soon realizes that he is going to be defined by his physical location: "When he was a boy in southern Illinois, Rooney worked with plows and cows.... Here he saw he was going to spend the rest of his life working with logs" (11). Ada sees him years later as actually having been shaped by the trees: "Sometimes she noticed that he looked bent over now, from the tree work, although he was only forty-one years old" (37). Clare believes that because his "was the first generation to rise in this wilderness ... some greatness lay in store for it, and some unnamable heroism would be his. He would achieve, he would do, succor, conquer, succeed" (34). John Ireland's experience on the surveying trip shapes his life and it is on Madrone Island after his family dies that he "first discovered that he was alone, and nothing the gulls did gainsaid it" (36). Clare's wife June, on the train trip from Maryland to Whatcom, is "softened … up for [Clare's] suit" when she sees a storm which looks tiny in the distance but which is as real to the people under it as her "supremely real Baltimore, Maryland, storms" are to her: "the sight of a storm so far away … made a girl, however finely fashioned, doubt her importance" (256,55). This experience of the natural environment prepares June to regard Clare "as a livehearted creature, who stirred among the living of her generation, and who bestrode the spherical world under its weathers just as she did, for a while,"[71] and changes the course of her life, for she never again lives in "supremely real Baltimore."

Second, as characters inhabiting a fictional world, they are defined by these physical descriptions which are related as if seen through their eyes and their experience. The novel's first description of the physical environment is seen from Ada's perspective, using her own words to convey her perceptions. From her first impressions of Whatcom, the reader forms his or her first impressions of both Ada and the physical qualities of the fictional world. Both Ada and Clare reveal something of their characters to the reader when they experience Mount Baker: "Mount Baker was pretty as a picture, Ada used to say, for its glaciers shone almost all night in summer, when snow was the last thing you expected to see anywhere, let alone halfway up the sky" (17); when Baker erupts in 1870, "Clare hoped the mountain would shoot red lava, so he could see it; the Lummis said it had done so once before.… Clare did not know it, but he loved Mount Baker; he checked it from those vantage points in town where he could see it.… Clare was twenty now; he took his loves hard" (31). The interaction between character and atmosphere in this novel cannot be over-emphasized. One critic suggests that the unifying principle of this wide-ranging novel is "Dillard's superb evocation of the implacable, no-nonsense relationship of these people to their surroundings " (*Publishers Weekly* 41).

Dillard establishes death as the boundary condition of the fictional world using these same prose and characterizing techniques. Her plain diction she often uses for surprise, as in the examples above of the end-of-sentence "hooks"; death frequently enters the fictional world here: "It took three months to clear the logjam on the Nooksack, and Eustace Honer drowned doing it" (104).[72] When Minta's family arrives to see her through her grief, death comes surprisingly at the end of a long paragraph: "In the next twenty minutes the group was walking … toward the ranch.… The Randalls had, in short, conquered their self-consciousness with Minta, when they turned up the road to her place and saw, in the clearing, her house on fire" (123). Two of Minta's children die in the fire. Death, like death, simply enters the scene. "No fake suspense in Annie Dillard's writing" (Keneally 9). Not only actual deaths, but images suggesting death also enter the simple prose startlingly: John reflects that he prefers the company of children and birds "because he admired their own purities and solitudes under the thrashing skies—the birds' stepping into corpses, the pretty children's watchfulness…" (235).

Dillard claims in *Living by Fiction* that "plain prose is almost requisite for handling violent or emotional scenes without eliciting dismay or nausea in the reader"; it is a prose which respects its readers, crediting them "with feeling and intelligence. It does not explain events in all their ramifications; it does not color a scene emotionally so that a reader knows what he should feel" (*LF* 119, 20). Rooney's death is a good example of how Dillard handles these emotionally charged scenes with respectful detachment. Rooney digs the last spadeful of dirt from a new well,

> and Ada heard a hiss when he pried it off. No water came out, just a hiss.
>
> Then Rooney fell over on his spade. He lay in the hole. He had gone down like a tree, head last. Ada questioned him.
>
> He lay still, with the back of his head toward the sky. Without knowing she did it, Ada pressed both hands to her jaws. (37)

These sentences could hardly be simpler in construction, using only simple prepositional phrases, an adverb and an adverbial simile to expand on the simple facts of Rooney's death.[73] Rather than overtly telling her readers to feel the importance of the event, Dillard uses the scene's odd details to make it particularly striking, and to communicate vividly Ada's shock. Dillard's prose handles Rooney's death with "distance … and respect," distance nearly to the point of abstraction, yet still portrays the scene's emotion.

Dillard's repetitive grammatical constructions also strengthen death's presence in the fictional world. In the scene in which Clare seizes his death and life from Beal, he has a visionary insight into the nature of physical reality:

> Then before him on the trestle over the water he saw the earth itself walking, the earth walking darkly as it always walks in every season: it was plowing the men under, and the horses, and the plows.
>
> The earth was plowing the men under, and the horses under, and the plows.… (353)

In passages like this, Dillard invokes the poetic possibilities of prose to vivify death.

Some of the subjects of Dillard's vivid descriptions take on symbolic overtones, gradually becoming associated with death and eventually coming to represent it. Keneally takes "The indigenous crab of this foggy rainy region … as a symbol of the tenuousness of life, the omnipresence of death" (9). John Ireland thinks of his dead family as "pinned … under the sea among crabs" (63). Beal is associated with the scavenging crabs, and the crabs with death, throughout the novel: as he prepares to murder Lee Chin, Beal notices the "Celestial's" "superstitious dread" of the crabs which "would roll in with the tide" (154); later, noticing the carcass of a shark, Beal remembers seeing it "crawling with crabs" which "ate the flesh in their clattering fashion, by squatting over it and lowering what looked like arms from their mouths and passing bites directly into what looked like stomachs" (168).[74] In another scene, he is seen eating crabs: "…he pulled from his mouth an orange crab leg" and when he stands "a fine sand and triangles of orange shell [fall] from his pants" (335, 37). Hugh first notices Beal's dead body when he sees "a dozen of those big Dungeness crabs that were pests alongshore … scrabbling in an inch or two of rising water" (378). Vinnie sees crabs climbing across his face and one coming out of his hip boots. Beal comes to seem like a crab, a scavenger seeking to derive sustenance and power from death. John Ireland feels like one submerged when he seeks Beal in the forest.

Characters also think of death in terms of simple and natural images. For instance, when the aged Ada is "Dying, with time on her hands, she recognized in her thoughts the same familiar, inescapable self she had been toting up hill and down dale these sixty-odd years. With a jolt she realized that the dying must often feel this way—steaming along just fine, while on ahead someone has torn up the rails" (332). Ada's variations on the "life as a journey" topos are particularly apt to the setting of the novel, and therefore reinforce the coherence of its fictional world while vivifying death. Clare imagines that "Death had opened wide its mouth and consumed his father from end to end as a cat eats a mouse" (209). When Clare is in the process of coming to terms with death, he notes some bird tracks on the beach and decides that life is a spool of footprints, with an arbitrary beginning and an abrupt end: "the tracks stopped—with the two feet pushed deep at the claws. The tracks ended for no reason.... His tracks, his lifetime tracks, would end abruptly, also—but he would have gone not up, like a bird into the sky, but down, into the ground" (214).[75]

Some of the images which characters use in thinking about death derive from deaths that are depicted in the novel. Clare, for example, turns Eustace's death into a simile for his own potential demise. It is life's lot that all people set "to work improving their prospects till their own feet [slip] and they [go] under themselves like Eustace Honer, protesting" (197). This might be called a homodiegetic simile, analeptically referring to an event in the novel, turning that event into a figure which the character uses to understand his own present reality. For instance, Ada turns Clare's story of a men's club initiatory rite into an image for her life. The Brotherhood of Owls tests its new members' mettle by pretending to brand them, switching a cold iron for a hot at the last instant (see

176–78). Ada reflects on her life: "She had a head for adventure when she was a merry girl. She had smelled the branding iron, and it was cold. Then she felt it, and it was hot, and she was burnt" (193). On her death bed, the image she uses to summarize her participation in life's "great drama" refers back to Rooney's death: "It had been her privilege to peer into the deepest well hole of life's surprise" (334). These images strengthen the internal coherence of the fictional world, creating a web of internal reference, and give that world depth in time; at the same time they mark off that world's boundary, death.

Characters are defined by their experience of death as much as by the physical environment which shapes their lives. On his trip to the mountains, John sees an Indian that enemy warriors have impaled onto a stake pounded deep into the ground; he sees Beal strangle a calf in an attempt to gain mastery over life, death and himself. These experiences with death teach him that "the world's people [are] forever cruel"; his family's mysterious and arbitrary death teaches him that "life in time [is] a freezing bivouac" (367). Hugh is also shaped by his encounters with death. He sees his father die, he lights the fire which burns the Honers' house, killing Lulu and Bert. He has found so many dead people that when the preacher at his father's funeral asks "*O Death, where is thy sting?*" he thinks "Just about everywhere, since you ask" (107); Senator Randall considers his grandson "death-stung," and imagines his "clear young soul, like a peeled peach, on which death's lashes had laid stripes" (145). Ada's loss of two children and two husbands defines her, giving her distance on the self-important busy-ness of Whatcom's life. Her life has been so thoroughly marked by death that when she approaches her own death, she does not mourn and roar, "looking for salvation" as she feels she should. Rather, she judges that "she had lived a good life.... For she had truly felt God's power...." This divine might she experiences in the form of death: "... Charley got killed in the rut. Nettie died, whose initials she wore in her braided-hair ring. She buried two fine husbands" (334).

Keneally points out that the action in *The Living* "is cyclical, returning again and again to events, imbuing them with poignancy" (9). This narrative strategy parallels the repetitive grammatical constructions, and like Dillard's prose it foregrounds death. The early history of the novel is told primarily as a summary of deaths. Chapter V begins "That spring, Chowitzit died" (22) and Chapter VI, "Nettie died when she was four" (27). Deaths are often mentioned again later in the novel. "A fall of slate from the coal mine roof bisect[s]" Chot Harshaw early in Whatcom's history (35). Later, while Ada is "Dying, with time on her hands," she recalls the accident:

> Years ago, when a load of slate slid off the coal mine roof and cut Chot Harshaw into two pieces across the middle, Rooney was among the men who sailed in to dig him out. 'Don't trouble yourselves, boys,' Chot Harshaw's top half had called out in a normal tone. 'I'm just fine, just fine.' (332)

Ada also remembers several of her experiences with death. She thinks of Hugh, "who used to be two years old on his mother's knees, like everybody else, and who had carried her Norval home by the ankles with his head hanging off" (332). She feels "Like Chowitzit in his blankets,…*melamoosed*" (333). These kinds of recollections of those who have "sifted off" give the fictional world an internal history which the reader shares, having already heard some of the incidents and having met some of the victims.

Dillard structures the novel in such a way that death becomes the boundary condition of the fictional world. In the first three books, she establishes the conditions of life in the frontier world, particularly the harshness of the environment and the "material fragility" of life (136). The reader is at first continually surprised, almost appalled, at the frequent deaths and how casually they are related. After a certain point, however, death's shock-value begins to diminish. Dillard seems to anticipate and control this effect, for even while we are growing used to death, the town of Whatcom is becoming more civilized and death becomes a less immediate concern of every-day life. The first generation in Whatcom seems aware, as young Hugh is later, that death is "no outrage, no freak, nothing not in the contract, and [never] really early, just soon" (136). They take death hard, as everyone always does, but they do not have the leisure to "come to terms with death": they must keep on with their lives just to keep one step ahead of death. Ada gently advises Minta to rejoin the living after the deaths of Eustace and her two children: "with the help of God you must stir yourself. For you have a child still living" (134). The inhabitants of the booming town of Whatcom, while they have the leisure to ponder the nature of reality, no longer have such an intimate acquaintance with death. Money and the products of progress stand between them and the conditions. This, at least, is Ada's critique of the situation: she sees man's "chasing after distinction and a backlog of money" and the raising of cities that accompanies these occupations as "bulwarks, as suits of armor over suits of mail, to shield them from the point glance of heaven"; that is, from the true conditions of human existence (190). It is at this point in the novel, when the people of Bellingham Bay reach a standard of life not unlike twentieth-century life, when the reader has become hardened to the realities of death, and when Dillard has convincingly built a fictional world whose boundary condition is death that she begins to examine in earnest the problem of finding meaning in the face of the conditions, indeed of even noticing those so recently unavoidable realities of human life, which, when noticed, make man feel himself to be a sojourner.

Responding to the Conditions: Senses, Mind, Spirit

Dillard makes death the obvious boundary condition of the novel's fictional world, but for the characters inhabiting this world, death is not necessarily such a clear boundary to life. Clare retains a child-like innocence into his adulthood and fails to become aware of the conditions of his own existence. The means by which he passes out of this stage, into an awareness of himself as sojourner and finally into his willed acceptance of that sojourn forms what Ames calls "the moral center to the book" (Ames 57). Dillard charts the steps in Clare's change against a three-stage phenomenology of spirit corresponding to her view of man as a sojourner: each of the stages describes a character's relationship to the conditions of his existence. In the life of the senses, there is no awareness of the conditions. In the life of the mind, the character is aware of the conditions to a degree, but the desire for order misshapes the objects of perception, so that awareness is only partial. The life of the spirit is a state of "higher innocence," in which the character achieves a "rough merger of the complex products of thought with the simple and received sensations of life in time" (Dillard qtd. in Hammond 38). Other characters can also be understood in terms of these three modes of life.

In a 1981 interview with Karla Hammond, Dillard refers specifically to the life of sensation in a summary of "The Living":

> It's a Western. It's set on the Northwest Coast in 1906. A good man, but a boyish man, lives contentedly with his wife and daughter. An evil man picks his name out of a hat and threatens to kill him. The good man, *who has been living the life of the senses*, starts to think. He realizes that he is going to die; consequently he realizes that he is alive. This sets him to noticing things.... (33; italics added)

The opening paragraphs of "The Living" depict Clare in just this state of childlike innocence: he is described as sleeping "like a baby"; his mind is "wholly absent[,]... not dreaming, but purely nowhere, purely sleeping." Before dawn his eyes open and "point at" his wife, the wall and the window, "but they moved reflexively and alone, as though the man were dead. He slept" ("The Living" 45). This image illustrates the paradox of this mode of life: it is a life absorbed in the objects of the senses, but it is a life of blindness. Living totally immersed in the materials of existence, it remains unaware of "the conditions," the fundamental problems of that life; it does not attempt to make the objects of its vision meaningful and therefore experiences no lack of meaning. Dillard depicts characters in this life as sojourners unaware of their sojourning.

Children epitomize this condition for Dillard. A child "dreams along, loving the exuberant life of the senses, in love with beauty and power, oblivious to herself" ("To Fashion a Text" 56).[76] Clare is first seen in *The Living* at age five, an innocent child. Years later, a picture of him as a boy shows him to June "in all his nascent nobility and susceptibility, wholly unknowing" (*The Living* 262). But he never grows out of this stage. Ada favors him, in his twenties, among all her children, living and dead, "for his persistent innocence and enthusiasm, and his glad ways" (35). But when he is still as carefree and innocent at forty-two, she thinks that "the times had gotten inside [him] in some ways as [he] aged and made [him] ordinary" (189). June loves him first as a "pleased, blithely unconscious boy" (262), but when he fails to mature, she sees him as "apparently devolv[ing] in wisdom" and she fears he is becoming a "piddling, unconscious institutional man" (265): "He believed in himself unshakably; he boasted and abounded; his hopes vaunted, his innocence preened; he would outdo all the world" (263).

In *The Living*, Dillard provides both internal and external perspectives on this life. Oblivious to June and Ada's growing dissatisfaction with him, Clare is quite pleased with his life. He takes pleasure in the objects of the senses: "Clare loved this place, his place, and he loved his time—what a time! He loved his wife, June, his daughter, Mabel,… the Lummis, the music, the mountains,… the present" (161). In "The Living," Clare thinks of himself that he "enjoys enjoyment" (50). Clare lives by whim, naïvely gleeful about his own lack of responsibility: "He never deliberately told a lie, and he rarely happened to keep a promise, He told people he hated schedules.… It was fine to have a drink, and almighty fine to have a family, and damned fine to have it rain the day he said he would fix the roof" (*The Living* 182). He has reflected on his life only enough to feel that he was a bit slow in getting going. Now that he has married June and invested her dowry in Whatcom's booming prospects (pleased with the prudence of his decision to diversify) he feels he is "becoming a man of substance" (181). The concrete simplicity of his life and the pleasure Clare takes in it are captured in these sentences:

> Clare blazed with health and abounded in the goodwill of men. He was … all possibility.… He was a giant in joy, speeding and thoughtless, suggestible, a bountiful child.… His wife laughed at his jokes; his mother waited on him; his red-haired daughter rode on his shoulders, and bounced her heels in his heart. (182)

Clare, in his own perception of himself at least, is appealing in his zeal for life.

Beal provides another view of Clare's life in the senses, similar to Ada and June's views, but entirely without their good will. In Beal's eyes, all the inhabitants of Whatcom are "laborers or sharpers with pretensions, who never left the life of sensation but only refined its objects: when they had a little land, or a ten-year-old name, they switched in their boots from beer to sherry, and got them a Lummi Indian to cut their wood" (156).[77] He considers Clare a semi-conscious, self-important, "foolish man of common clay, who derived his convictions from others: a sort of stretched boy, who … talked about 'pleasure' as though everyone agreed that pleasure was the first-rate thing" (174). Beal's most telling assessment is that Clare is "insensible":

> The overblown esteem in which a thoughtless fellow like Fishburn held himself *blinded him to his true condition*—his failure, his puniness, and his cowardice. He thought he owned his life.… [Beal] would reveal to Fishburn, inescapably, the spectacle of himself as a whipped and trembling dog, one of more than one billion whipped dogs who trotted about the planet on business, naked and plug-ignorant. (174–75; italics added)

Beal sees the life of the senses as a life of sojourning, and considers all other men to be living that life. He intends to enlighten Clare to these conditions: "He meant to dramatize to an ordinary man, by the threat of death, the spectacle of his own cowardice. He meant to reveal to the man his own lifelong ignorance and self-satisfaction, and to vivify and display both his helplessness and his insignificance" (337). He will show Clare himself as a sojourner.

The life of the senses, then, is a state of "nondifferentiation between self and other," in which the self is not "aware of itself as distinct from the natural and social totality within which it [is] immersed" (Taylor 231).[78] Clare's innocence is a result of his failure to differentiate himself from the natural and social context of his existence. He does not see that life is lived in relation to these contexts and, therefore, perceives no lack of meaning. If meaning "is a function of the relationship between two worlds" (Scholes and Kellogg 82), the life of the senses is essentially a meaningless existence in its failure to perceive the contrasting realms of "the simple and received sensations of life in time" and "the complex products of thought." This life is also "the life of greed," as Dillard describes it in an outline to "The Living" (reproduced in the appendix; see also *The Writing Life* 32–33). Though Clare has little awareness of self, his actions and pleasures are self-oriented: he loves "his place," "his time," "his wife" and daughter (161). Reality consists of the reality *he* experiences. Furthermore, this mode of life "lack[s] the very concept of will," as Beal puts it, describing Clare (174). Clare can make no meaningful decisions, decisions which would differentiate him from the sensorium. He remains unaware of the complex opposites which constitute human existence, of time and eternity, of self and other nor of individual and society, of possibility and actuality; that is, he is unaware of himself as a sojourner.

In *The Living*, it is most often a personal experience of death which awakens the characters to the nature of their existence. It is Charley's death that wakens Ada: "she had not braced herself for life back then;... she did not know how life could be, how it could dish you between one step and another. She had been a merry girl, [with] a head for adventure" (9). When she arrives in Whatcom at the beginning of the novel, she is aware of herself as a sojourner, as her quotation of I Chronicles 29:15 indicates (see p. 63 above). She sees herself as a sojourner under the heavens and under "the pointy glance of heaven" (190): "Ada reckoned that intervening between her and the heavenly bodies there was her blanket, the house's log purlins and its shake roof, the stiff boughs of the forest, and the cover of cloud. She wished there were a sight more" (8). John Ireland is awakened to the harshness of the conditions as a boy by his experience of death; he also experiences the lack of meaning as a sojourn under the heavens: "Overhead the hard stars uttered their gibberish from horizon to horizon. How loose he seemed to himself, under the stars! The spaces between the stars were pores, out of which human meaning evaporated" (70).[79] Compare Clare's experience of his reality, represented in this perception of his family, the reader's last view through his eyes before Beal threatens him:

> Clare could see, reflected in the dark window across the table, the yellow gas flame floating and globular like a planet or star. Beneath it, and also floating over the outside dark, were reflections from the kitchen window behind him—which contained again, golden, the gas lamp, and his wife's round head in motion, and Mabel near and spread pale along the darkness, and a cluster of vaporous teacups on the table, and a cold bottle of milk. (182)

The objects of his senses and his love, safely enclosed within the four walls of his house, comprise his universe. Although he has experienced death—his sister Nettie's and his father's; he sees his friend Eustace Honer drown and a *melamoosed* Indian—Clare has not woken to the conditions.[80]

Beal's threat of death wakens him almost instantly. Even while Beal explains the nature of Clare's new reality, Clare is beginning to reflect on himself; and when Beal leaves, Clare has been given a new perspective on his life: "Clare *had been* so young, ever since he could remember—so young, and so full of ideas" (185). In bed a few minutes later, he perceives a lack of meaning in his life: "he found he could not recollect why he had been so all-fired busy, all these years, congratulating himself, like everyone else" (187). Clare's reality is no longer co-extensive with the simple objects of his perceptions. This change is symbolized when "streamers of colored fog [begin] to advance on the black clearness of Clare's thoughts" (187).[81] This image suggests that Clare has become aware of sensation. And he recollects that he used to be conscious of his own life's fragility, as his daughter Mabel seems to be of hers, who believes "herself to be surrounded by sharks and black death" in her bed at night. "She was right," Clare thinks. "She was surrounded by sharks and black death. He used to know that, too, when he was a boy, but it had slipped his mind" (187).[82] Albin describes this effect: "Clare no longer dismisses this fear as childish. He recalls that as a child he too knew the fundamental fragility of life, and thanks to Beal Obenchain's threat he once again feels this fragility to the very bone" (872). He has, in short order, begun to notice his own existence.

The life of the mind, toward which Beal pulls Clare from the life of the senses, is most clearly represented in *The Living* by Beal. He believes that "Life is mind" (175) and considers himself an "intellectual" (155). Dillard's only direct reference to the life of the mind is in the interview with Hammond:

> In the life of the mind, that innocence [i.e., of the life of the senses] is lost, which on the whole is just as well. But the thoughtfulness of the life of the mind in many ways defeats its own objects; the thinker's thoughts re-make the world before his eyes, and prevent his studying the things as they are. (38)

The life of the mind is aware of the conditions, to a degree at least, aware of the paired contraries in which life is lived. The occupant of the life of the mind attempts to reconcile the contraries of life, that is, to find meaning, by purposefully striving after a universal principle. Beal's principle is intellectual purity. He considers himself "a man of science, a man who had access to metagnostical structures, a man of methods contrived in purity, who knew secrets" (175).[83] Beal seeks meaning only through intellectually pure methods, and tries to keep himself unpolluted by such factors as emotion or fellow-feeling. He strangles a calf and lashes a Chinese houseboy to a wharf piling at low tide to gain power over these impurities in himself. Taylor's description of Kierkegaard's ethical stage fits Beal: in this mode of life the self attempts "to define itself through deliberate decisions that concretely embody universal moral principles in the life of the particular conscientious actor" (Taylor 231). Beal thinks of himself as a "demiurge" ("The Living" 48), which, in Plato, is a "subordinate deity who fashions the sensible world in the light of eternal ideas," or more generally, "one that is an autonomous creative force or decisive power" (*Webster's Ninth New Collegiate*).[84] Beal attempts to wrest meaning from reality by means of will power, differentiating himself from nature and society by decision. John thinks of Beal as

> a closed man who lacked all ease, who jerked himself along *by a series of acts of will*.... Indeed, overgrown Beal made vows so consciously, and with such strain, that he seemed to fancy that he alone of all people felt any responsibility to the world, and he alone made moral choices. (370; italics added)

Beal thinks of himself as "mighty because he was bound. He buckled himself down with constraints like steel harness, and grew strong resisting" (175). Dillard could almost be describing Beal and the life of the mind in the following comment from her introduction to a volume of Fred Chappell's short stories: "At his very worst, man betrays the human longing for a kingdom not of this world.... [H]e shuts his eyes to all he knows and gives himself over to idolatry,[85] seeking the merciless secular power of a material kingdom" (Foreword xvi).

The life of the mind is ultimately also an unseeing life: in its attempt to overpower the conditions with pure mental energy, it loses contact with those conditions. In *Living* *by Fiction*, Dillard suggests that in secular existentialism, "you do not find or discover personal meaning in the world, nor do your unchanging social traditions dish it out, nor does your church. Instead, you make it up. You make it up from what is left, from internal elements alone, such as moods" (136). Beal rejects, with a vow, society as a meaningful enterprise (he uses a religious image, since a major aspect of the society he rejects is its religion):

> The colorful men and women of the world distracted themselves in all the old familiar ways, and babbled in families over the daffodils. They created in a million tongues a sentimental league to shield, deny, soothe, and deceive each other from knowledge of their own spilling numbers, of the foolishness of their many local preenings, and the piteousness of their helpless condition. Obenchain was too honest to subscribe to these deceptions. He had long ago vowed, and renewed his vow frequently, that if holding hands in a circle and singing hymns, as it were, was what it took to make life endurable, he would rather die. (374)

Having purified himself of all sources of meaning but reason, Beal is left with only his internal sources of order, his will and his reason. And he loses faith in these internal resources when he realizes that his experiment on Clare has not gone as he wished, leaving him with no pure way to make life meaningful.

> His feelings had rotated under him; the force of his life had turned on him overnight.
>
> … His life he considered vile. The memory of his own fitful enthusiasms rebuked him. Nothing had come of them, and he could never believe in himself again; everything was draining away into a basin of loathing.…
>
> His vision was clear. No assertion of the worthlessness of living any life could be denied by reason at any point. (373–74)

His rejection of all means but reason reveals the limitations of vision in the life of the mind. Beal's purity, then, is an impurity. Though Beal thinks he sees clearly, the imagery used to depict him hints at his true condition when, in the scene referred to above, "He walked unseeing"; earlier, when Clare refuses to participate in Beal's revised experiment, Beal's "head sway[ed] up like a blind man's" (353). The life of the mind, like the life of sensation, is an unseeing life: though it has a degree of awareness it is unable to see any satisfying answers to the problems raised by the difficult conditions.

John Ireland also lives the life of the mind following his early awakening to the conditions. McCullough says that "In the presence of death, the living either lose or find the reasons to 'go on.' John Ireland Sharp responds to evil and death by retreating into his own world of despair" (McCullough 46). As Kingsolver puts it, "no one else in the novel takes life quite so hard" as John Ireland (693). He finds order for a time in education, particularly in the classics, losing "himself in the firm channels of grammar, his mouth open, his pencil strangled near its tip" (63).[86] He continues his education in New York, where his experience of poverty leads him to seek social order and justice in socialism. But when the reform movement in Washington turns against the unemployed Chinese laborers who had built the railroads, he loses faith in socialism, in mankind, and like Beal, in his own judgment:[87]

> Nothing in his experience altered him more, not even falling in love, for from boyhood he trusted his judgment, and he had given the movement his whole heart.... He continued to study and reflect, but he had no hope for it, and the habit was sad as a hobby. (80–81)

The narrator suggests that John's disillusionment has more to do with his limitations as a moral thinker than with any event:

> As a moral thinker, John Ireland admitted the categories right and wrong only, and could not compass or endure complexity, misstep, or paradox. If the socialists were wrong about the Chinese, they were corrupt. He washed his hands of them ... and relinquished the movement to which he had devoted ten years. (81)

Taylor puts the central problem of the life of the mind, which corresponds to Kierkegaard's ethical stage, as follows:

> When the ethical obligation is grasped with total seriousness, and ethically it can be taken in no other way, its fulfillment appears more and more impossible.… The more earnestly one struggles, the deeper the disparity becomes, until at last the self acknowledges a persistent conflict between the opposites it ought to synthesize… bring[ing] with it a sense of guilt; (251)

it also brings a consciousness of "separation from and opposition to the absolute" (251). John gradually withdraws from the world in which moral decisions are necessary. He nostalgically seeks solace among birds, trees and children for "their welcome unselfconsciousness in his presence" and "their own purities and solitudes under the thrashing skies" (235). Instead of progressing on toward the life of the spirit, John eventually chooses to retreat to the life of the senses on Madrone Island.

Although the life of the mind cannot provide Beal or John with the meaning they seek, Beal is able, from this position, to draw Clare out of his innocence into an awareness of the conditions. The possibility of dying makes Clare begin "an exploration of what it means to be human, balanced ever at the unfathomable, feeling moment of existence" (Gloss 2). Beal threatens Clare late in the evening of Christmas Eve, 1892, becoming a kind of savior to him.[88] In the following days, Clare begins to face the possibility of his own death. His reflections are presented in analepsis, from the perspective of January 6, the Epiphany, when he begins to see what is happening to him. He becomes reflective; he watches himself become more detached and gets a broader, more stable perspective on reality:

> Throughout his life before Obenchain's threat, he awakened some mornings and perceived that things were easy and pleasant, and some mornings, by contrast, he fancied that things were fixed and dreary, and these moods reversed from hour to hour, wherever they started. He had begun to view his own Golden Street … altered

> into an abstraction and revealed as a piffling accident.... Whatcom was a town among thousands of towns.... His time, furthermore, was a time among times. (207)

He recognizes some of the dichotomies in which life is lived: time and eternity, individual and society, accident and necessity. For instance, time he feels as "a knife peeling him like an apple [which] would continue through him till he was gone" (214). And he "had begun to wonder where, in this series of accidents, the accidental part left off" (207). He evaluates his life with the cool eye of reason: "Was he still so insubstantial, a man without existence except as a posing figure reflected in others' eyes?" (216). He comes to see society and its occupations much as Beal does:

> Naturally society cherished itself alone; it prized what everyone agreed was precious, despised what everyone agreed was despicable, and ignored what no one mentioned—all to its own enhancement, and with the loud view that these bubbles and vapors were eternal and universal.... He had embedded himself in the company like a man bricked into a wall.... Who could blame him?—when people have always lived so. Now, however, he saw ... the preenings of man laid low. (217–18)

Dillard summarizes the change in the Clare of "The Living": "He realizes he is going to die; consequently he realizes that he is alive. This sets him to noticing things" (qtd. in Hammond 38). This new awareness of his surroundings is contrasted with John's blindness. On a walk together, Clare sees the surface of the water which "showed the wind raking over its face like fingers," he hears some men amusing themselves on the beach and smells "the wet wool of his jacket" (286); John, meanwhile, sees "nothing, not the smirking girl wearing two caps, the buggy whose driver checked the reins to miss splashing him, or the building frame on the hillside that showed, through its dark doorways and window cuts, slatted squares of sea" (288).

By the end of the day on January 6, Clare has recognized life's defining boundary condition. He quotes from Isaiah 38:1, "Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live" (220). He recognizes the reality of death, and in so doing, wakes up. His new awareness of himself as a sojourner is captured in his reaction when he notices Beal watching him: "Clare felt immense in his own yard.... He was trembling in a desert, and neither blackberry thorns nor buildings hid him from the limitless, empty fire of the sun" (198).[89] Although Clare has finally begun to believe in his own death, the life of the mind offers him no satisfactory answer to the question raised by death, namely, "What other life was possible than a life made trivial by death?" (209). The last reference to Clare in this section of the novel, Book IV, is Beal's report that he has fled in fear—fear of death—from him in the street on the evening of January 7.

At the beginning of Book V, the narration has leapt ahead several months to show Clare to the reader as having become reconciled to his life and his death. In June's eyes, he has "wakened and hardened" (265). Even Beal notices a change in Clare, though not the change he hypothesized as the probable result of his experiment: "His gait had wakened, and he looked sharp, but not strictly in fear" (337). This alteration is visible through Clare's own eyes in his new awareness of June. Albin links this change to Clare's "growing spirituality.... The relationship most deeply affected by this newfound spirituality is that between himself and his wife" (872). When he was first becoming aware of sensation as a way of life, Clare had valued the "light reflected from human skin [as] the most moving sight [he] knew" (194). Now he is starting to see more deeply into life:

> He had become aware only recently ... of June's unsearchable depths.... He saw she acted from an unmentioned source of feeling, a source that, he discovered, he tapped as well.... Again and again he discovered at his side ... the quick and glowing creature he first courted eight years ago in Goshen.... June was a marvel, and she smelled good. (268–69)

He develops a philosophical, spiritual outlook on life, based on this perception: he "had recently arrived at this notion, then, that the ideal alone is real, and contempt is misunderstanding, and indifference is mental failure." Contempt and misunderstanding are failures of perception, failures to see, as the lover in Clare's view, is "enabled to see—as if the heavens busted open to admit a charged light—those virtues the beloved does possess in their purest form" (269). The economic panic of 1893 "failed to panic him" (336), because instead of measuring his substance financially, he now uses death as his standard. Time's passage is no longer onerous; instead of feeling time "reeling him in jawfirst ... headlong and breathless" (198), he has an "increasing sensation of participation, of glory, even, in a world of flux" (331).

Clare is moving into the life of the spirit, about which Dillard says, "In the life of the spirit, time is ample and its passage sweet" (*The Writing Life* 33). Dillard also describes this life as possessing "a higher innocence, a new innocence: the redemption of knowledge, the rough merger of the complex products of thought, with the simple and received sensations of life in time" (qtd. in Hammond 38). Clare has a kind of vision of life as a "fragile, fraught reality":

> It was always and everywhere exactly as real and vivid as this... always the planet where you belonged, the generation you hated to leave, and nowhere more telling, more saturated with meaning than this place at this moment—not any Galilean shore or hill, not in any parliament nor battlefield.... This is all there had ever been and would ever be. (286–87)

The climax to these gradual developments in Clare's vision of reality and his relationship to his world comes in a decisive encounter with Beal late in August. Beal has decided that because his experiment is not working as planned, he will withdraw his threat to kill Clare; this, he thinks, might reintroduce the element of uncertainty necessary to deprive him of his life:

> Perhaps uncertainty alone could destroy.... He would take it all back. He would tell him he was by no means going to kill him. Tell him it was a joke, or an experiment, something finished. Then—what would Fishburn do? Would he be acute enough to reckon the experiment just begun? (338)

Beal finds Clare and tries to tell him "he was not going to kill him, he was not going to die" (352), but Clare will have none of this: he has been awakened to his own death by Beal's threat and even as he walks toward Beal, who waits for him on the railroad trestle leading back into Whatcom, he is defining himself by an "absolute decision" (Taylor 252). Dillard has disguised this decision in the novel, but the version of this scene in the short story makes its point more obviously.[90] Clare sees Beal and tries to decide whether to ready a weapon to use against him, but, he realizes, "it was not an important decision" ("The Living" 60; dropped from the corresponding passage in the novel). He keeps walking toward Beal (passage from "The Living" on the left, from *The Living* on the right)

> And Clare changed. He walked from the long habit of walking, and he changed as a pane of glass changes when you walk beside it—from reflecting as a mirror to transparent as the air. Clare felt wide and spread as the sky. He had a family in his skull; his legs were trees moving. He knew he was walking as if he were opening something as a boat's bow opens the water. He himself was being opened, as if Obenchain were a table saw. He was a clod of dirt that the light splits, or a peeled fish. ("The Living" 60)

> As he walked from the long habit of walking, he felt wide and aerated as the sky. He knew he was walking as if he were opening the air as a canoe bow opens the river. He himself was being opened as if Obenchain were a table saw. He was a clod of dirt that the light splits.[91] (*The Living* 352)

The clarity of vision in the life that he literally walks into is likely the significance behind his name. With this clear view of reality, Clare refuses to let go of his own death after Beal has given it to him: "'No,' he said to Obenchain,… 'I am going to die.' Someday I will die" ("The Living" 60).

Clare has taken the leap of faith in which the self transforms itself. As Taylor describes it,

> In this decisive moment, the self-conscious and freely active individual confronts an uncertain future composed of unmediated alternatives in the face of which he must reappropriate his past and redefine his actuality by means of his own resolution. Through such a decision, the self becomes itself, defines itself, assumes a concrete and unique identity by which it differentiates itself from other individuals. (258)

Dillard represents this move with her symbolic, glowing description of Clare's matter-of-fact response. He simply walks by Beal onto the trestle:

> Clare moved onto the walkway, nodding and serious; he held his breath as if he were diving. The trestle quit the shore, and Clare stepped out over the bay and the strait in a socket of light. Sky pooled under his shoulders and arched beneath his feet. Time rolled back and bore him; he was porous as bone.
>
> … Clare was burrowing in light upstream. All the living were breasting into the crest of the present together.… they ran up a field as wide as earth, opening time like a path in the grass, and he was borne among them. No, he said, peeling the light back, walking in the sky toward home; no. (*The Living* 352–53)

Clare dives up into the sky, not down, the direction he had anticipated going at the end of his spool of footprints (214; see note 74). No longer "directionless in the tumult of his own death" (198), he knows with certainty where he is bound. He possesses his own death (see 389): as Dillard describes it, Clare will not let Beal take it away: "He's been given his life; he won't let it go. He *is* going to die, and he knows it now" (qtd. in

Hammond 33). Time has been redeemed: "To feel time beating you senseless—it seemed to him—that was the great thing, to feel time beating you off the beaten track and down to the beaches, where the tide sucked at the bluffs... that was the great thing" (357). It bears him up instead of reeling him in. He is still a sojourner, but now he walks "in the sky."

Clare's life of the spirit, then, is characterized by his reconciliation with the conditions of his life. He has differentiated himself as a perceiving being in the natural world and as an individual in society. He is less tied to concrete reality, willing to see beyond the physical into people and things, into reality. Though Whatcom is dying in an economic crisis, so that Glee thinks "nothing is stirring," "To Clare it seemed that everything was stirring" (357). At Beal's funeral, when June gives her characteristic "Hurrah, boys," glad for Clare's freedom from Beal's threat, Clare is more respectful of death: "one box was like another, after all" (386). His respect for those who have not yet left the other modes of life is evident in his evaluation of Pearl's ambition for material possessions: though greedy, snobbish Pearl is an easy mark for criticism, Clare's critique is insightful and mature, wise and gentle: "Death would fetch Pearl away like the rest of us, Clare thought, and her piling up of things now did not mean she did not know, but meant that she did" (396). In his life as a politician, he has recognized the need to make compromises—the life of the spirit is, after all, a compromise between mind and senses—but he makes these compromises at his own expense, rather than at others': he finds "he must either bed down with thieves ... to magnify Whatcom's prospects, or ... drill holes in the seven or eight other towns' men, poke embers down them, and let them knock themselves over" (389).[92] His participation in politics demonstrates that he has not rejected society as Beal and John do in their failure to progress beyond the life of the mind. Rather, he achieves a "rough merger," finding a way to maintain his individuality while remaining grounded in society: he does not "rise above" the conditions of his time and place, as Mathews claims (181). The extended denoument of the novel, unlike many other epiphanic fictions, shows a character being transformed in the aftermath of an epiphanic experience. Dillard seems to be striving for an epiphanic, spiritual realism here, for though Clare has changed, has reached the life of the spirit, he has not become perfect nor has he ceased to perceive himself as a sojourner. Dillard says, "Man's eternal will to purity and his tortured will to transcendence never escape either his own intrinsic and tragic forgetfulness nor the world's thousand temporal traps" (Foreword xvi), and this remains Clare's conundrum too:

> He would never have guessed a man his age would have to keep reminding himself of what he knew was true and constant, but in his particularly sorry case he tended to drift and slip if he did not set himself straight every day—even every hour. He possessed, he said to himself, his own death, as Chowitzit hunting possessed fire in a gourd lashed to his skin, but he kept letting the tarnfool thing go out. (389)

In spite of the difficulties, Clare defines himself in the simple act of clinging to the reality of which he has recently become aware, redeeming the conditions, and achieving the "rough merger" of the life of the spirit.

Narrating Sojourning

In his review of *The Living*, Albin says that the novel is "spiritually and emotionally challenging—and also strengthening" (873). Other critics have made similar comments but not all feel this way about it. In this section, I wish to address the question arising from these divergent responses, focusing on the center of the controversy, the novel's tone. It has been necessary to delay this examination until now because the answer to the enigma of the narrator's tone depends on the novel's depiction of man as sojourner and on the three possible responses to that condition.

Unfavorable reviews of the novel have mainly faulted Dillard with an inappropriate narratorial distance from her characters and a lack of plot or action. *Kirkus Reviews* claims that "a certain emotional distance from her many characters … takes[s] some of the power out of her punch" (130). Sweeney suggests that "Most of the characters are expressively drawn, memorable, but Dillard doesn't often get inside their hearts" (13), while Adams is less charitable: readers will have "to look hard for anything resembling real characters or a plot" (128).

Dillard does tend to use her characters to enhance the novel's atmosphere. Her many odd-balls, hermits, townsfolk and Easterners—often defined by a single telling feature—function as pieces of scenery, filling up the fictional world and creating a sense of the diversity of life in Whatcom. Legless Eastern investor Arthur Pleasants, the idiosyncratic Lummi Indians with their gentle ways and flattened foreheads, John Ireland's kleptomaniacal wife Pearl, and two of the characters from the actual history of the region, "Tommy Cahoon, the scalped Pullman conductor; and George Bacon, the lively little mortgage agent" ("Author's Note"), all these characters serve primarily to characterize the town of Whatcom, which, as Kingsolver notes, "might be said to be" the novel's "central character" (693). The townspeople are used to define the town just as the characters are defined by their environment; unfortunately, a side-effect of this technique is that the characters seem distant.

Adding to the sense of distance is the frequent use of indirect modes of narration. The novel contains very little direct dialogue. Rarely is a conversation reported in its entirety. Rather, one character's distinctive, slangy comments will be quoted and the remainder summarized in indirect discourse. In passages from the novel that can be directly compared with corresponding ones in the short story Dillard makes fewer narratorial comments about the characters and action. And she seems to use more free indirect discourse in relating the character's point of view in the novel. Many of the novel's main events are told in analepsis, as a character remembers the significant moment; while this technique tends to enhance the fictional world by deepening its internal history and by giving a character's slant on the events and reporting the events simultaneously, it also makes events remote in time and less significant as actions in the plot. Rubin is so put off by this curious lack of action "in a novel that purports to look unflinchingly at human life and nature" that he is driven to lament

> there is not a single sex scene in this book—nor even a graphic description of birth. Nothing, in fact, comes to life: not the meandering, repetitive, unfocused narrative; not the stilted dialogue; not the characters, who seem shrunken—as if viewed from the wrong end of a telescope. (A12)

Gloss turns Rubin's vice into a virtue, claiming that the strength of the novel is its evocation of "the reiterant, precarious, wondrous, solitary, terrifying, utterly common condition of human life" (Gloss 1). She suggests, in effect, that the novel's is a different realism than the one Rubin seeks; but the question remains whether Dillard has committed the imitative fallacy by representing an "unfocused" reality with an unfocused narrative.

The novel's lack of significant action also contributes to the narrator's apparent emotional distance. Because the conflict between characters is less significant than the interaction between the characters and their environment, there is little action besides the strenuous activities which alone sustain the pioneers' life: felling trees, fishing, agriculture, housework. Almost no suspense is created in this novel. There are relatively few exciting events. John Ireland's trip to the mountains is told not for the thrills derived from hiking through some of America's roughest terrain, but for the atmosphere of the place and time which are evoked by the trip and the effect on John of what he sees. The reviewer in *Publishers Weekly* suggests that "Place and time are drawn with irresistible force—almost displacing plot…"(41). The novel's central conflict between Beal and

Clare generates no external, physical action, even though that conflict is a battle between life and death: Beal threatens Clare verbally in his parlor; Clare goes for several walks; Beal scares Clare out of Clare's own garden and out of the street (both of which episodes are related in analepsis, diffusing any suspense); Clare and Beal meet at a town picnic and Beal is enraged to find Clare unafraid (Beal's anger is seen for the reader by John Ireland, distancing the force of that emotion); Clare and Beal meet on the railroad trestle and Clare walks by Beal, ignoring the new twist he tries to put on his experiment with Clare.

Other critics have questioned the novel's powers of evocation. The reviewer in the *New Yorker* reports that he finds "both the setting and the individuals who inhabit it are convincing in a daguerreotype fashion—they seem touchingly antique, that is—but they never completely come to life" (80). But even unconvinced readers like Rubin affirm—perhaps unintentionally—the effectiveness of Dillard's evocation of death's possibility: "… it has begun to seem that no sooner is a character introduced than he … is going to die.… [Y]ou keep waiting as you turn each page for the next fatal blow" (A12). While Dillard cannot have wished for the reader to be alienated from the book and its fictional world by all this death, she does I think strive to make death into the kind of pressing and defining reality that Rubin's criticism suggests it is.[93] When Minta hears of Eustace's death and thinks "I have been expecting this right along, and here it is" (106), and the reader concurs, having been anticipating another character's demise, it is a sign that the atmosphere of the novel is one in which death is a reality and not unexpected.

One possible explanation for the distance that Dillard has her narrator maintain from her characters and the fictional world—and this does seem an intended effect and not just the mark of inexperience with long fiction, as some critics imply—is that Dillard wants to treat the theme of life and death and the pioneering setting without sentimentality. As she admits, "I like to work at dangerous borders. I take risks with sentimentality because I dig into hard things. When you're talking about the burning of a little girl [the subject of *Holy* *the Firm*] you're talking about a hard thing. You will not be sentimental unless you're a fool" (qtd. in Hammond 34). Ames credits her with success on this count, describing the novel as a "straightforward, bleak evocation of a time and place so often buried in romanticism" (57).

There is a better explanation for the narrator's distance, however, and that is to see the narrator as occupying the life of the spirit; Dillard's narrator, that is, is a "sojourner among sojourners" (Foreword xvi). From this point of view, all the novel's "problems" result from Dillard's attempt to do two things at once. First, she is trying to create an evocative fictional world and to depict her characters' search for meaning in that world in a convincing way; but she also tries to depict this world from the point of view of the life of the spirit. This way of seeing the narrator is not apparent until the reader has reached the novel's end and seen Clare achieve this mode of life. For much of the novel, the tone remains an enigma. For instance, in the absence of any narratorial assessment of Beal or John, the reader wonders how they are to be taken. Does John retreat to the island or retire, a hero for willing to leave civilized life and return to nature? Beal seems "evil," but the narrator never confirms that assessment, leaving the reader unsure: perhaps he is a Nietzschean hero? He is a kind of Christ, saving Clare from an obviously inadequate way of life.

When Clare displays the respect for other which I have argued he does, he provides a hint as to the manner in which the narrator has been treating her characters throughout the novel. She has not criticized them for their attempts to find meaning in their conditions. The gentle irony with which the narrator refers to her characters and their lives is not condemnatory, but as warm as Clare's assessment of Pearl's ambition. Their divergent responses to their realities, their beliefs about their relationship to the natural and the divine realms are allowed to stand side-by-side, unresolved. At first, the flatness with which deaths are announced is disconcerting; the narrator seems crass to take the time to develop and interest the reader in characters like Rooney or Eustace only to kill them off in mid-sentence. However, the narrator's distance on the lives and deaths of her characters makes sense if she is seen to occupy the life of the spirit. She is reconciled to the conditions of the fictional world which she depicts, not deluded by the busyness of human society and not surprised that death is part of life's contract. It is this perspective which makes her seem emotionally distant.

The plain prose style Dillard chose for the novel, which treats its subjects with distance and respect, also has, as Dillard describes it in *Living by Fiction*, something about it "which smacks of moral goodness.... It honors the world. It is courteous.... It is intimate with character; it is sympathetic.... It submits to the world; it is honest. It praises the world by seeing it. It seems even to *believe* in the world it honors with so much careful attention" (120–21). This prose is fit for expressing the life of the spirit. It seems to achieve a kind of rough merger of its own, showing things "as they are," apparently "without bias or motive" (122), though, as Dillard admits, all language use is selective and ordering. It finds a balance between the conditions and the desire for order, and in doing so evokes the "fraught, fragile" view of reality as seen from the life of the spirit.

This prose gives distance, but it is not a god's-eye remove. The narrator remains a "sojourner among sojourners." The narrator's participation in the community she depicts is evident in her sharing of the community's medium of communication, the archaizing combination of slang and Chinook which makes the novel's language unique. Dillard's narrator is no scathing social critic, though everything from the deforestation of the region by the settlers to their treatment of the indigenous population to the injustices of capitalism falls under her gently ironizing eye. Her critique of the world in which her characters live is not like Beal's harsh, renunciatory assessment, but more like Clare's efforts to improve his world at the end of the novel.

While much contemporary fiction displays its awareness of its own relative and limited perspective through its use of meta-narrative techniques, Dillard prefers subtler techniques. One of her insights is that perception shapes reality in the process of receiving the data of that reality, so she would be remiss if she pretended that her way of seeing man as a sojourner and the three stages of life is more real than any other. She does not make her perspective meta-narratively obvious, though, as much contemporary fiction does, narratologically removing any possible means of reading it as an authoritative view of reality. Dillard prefers subtler methods. She creates a narrator who is not co-extensive with her. For instance, the narrator possesses restraint that Dillard does not: Dillard describes Clare as "the good man" and Beal as "the evil man" in her summary of "The Living" (qtd. in Hammond 33), but nowhere in the novel itself does the narrator directly judge her characters. Dillard is suspicious of the hermit's way of life, the life which John Ireland chooses, declaring it to result in "the torpor of deprivation. Soon your famished brain will start to eat you" ("Why I Live Where I Live" 92); the narrator, however, never condemns John for his decision to return to the island home of his youth. In fact, it is not entirely clear that he does not achieve a kind of rough merger of his own. Dillard's narrator is a fiction, is a fictional point of view and as Dillard realizes, fiction is always focalized, always arguing a point. The point of view Dillard chooses in *The Living* is one that is consistent with the theme being developed within the novel. She depicts man's sojourn from the point of view of a sojourner. The rough merger which Clare achieves and from which the narrator speaks parallels the synthesis achieved in art, and therefore *The Living* represents Dillard's own aesthetic sojourn.

Through the use of a narrative focalized from the life of the spirit, the reader is not just shown a world in which characters search for meaning among the difficult conditions; the reader is drawn into a way of seeing the world, a world view in which meaning is a possibility: by depicting a world in which meaning is a possibility and being itself a context in which meaning is a possibility, the novel represents the potentially meaningful realm Dillard sees man as occupying.

CONCLUSION

Singing Round the Fire

In her attempt to answer the questions Where are we? and What are we doing here?, Annie Dillard develops a vision of man as a sojourner. Waking to find himself in the middle of an ongoing life which does not immediately yield its sense to his probings, man feels as a vagrant. He can feel like a vagrant, though, only because he seems to believe that there might be an ordering principle which could render his sojourn meaningful. He feels as though he occupies this place of the absence of meaning only temporarily, only until he finds the significance for which he searches.

In the world view presented in Dillard's nonfictional and fictional texts, art is man's response to discovering himself wandering for a while toward an uncertain end. As Dillard puts it, the "nowhere" that often seems our destination "is our cue: the consort of musicians strikes up, and we in the chorus stir and move and start twirling our hats" turning our goal-less "drift to dance" ("Sojourners," TST 152). Art offers man objects which can be interpreted, from which systems of significance can be derived. And these objects and their meanings seem to refer to the world, so that man, at the very least, perceives in art the possibility for discovering meaning in his world, for ordering his reality and, therefore, for finding an end to his sojourn. It may be a slim possibility art proffers, but as a sojourner, man is willing to—indeed, seems unable *not* to—pursue the quest for meaning in art.

Art objects also offer us consolation on our journey through time and nature.

> The very landscapes heave; change burgeons into change.... Mountains tremble, the ice rasps back and forth, and the protoplasm furls in shock waves, up the rock valleys and down., ramifying possibilities, riddling the mountains.... [T]he whole tumult is hurled. The planet spins, rapt inside its intricate mists. The galaxy is a flung thing, loose in the night, and our solar system

> is one of many dotted campfires ringed with tossed rocks. What shall we sing?
>
> What shall we sing, while the fires burn down? We can sing only specifics, time's rambling tune, the places we have seen, the faces we have known. ("Life on the Rocks," TST 130)

It does not occur to everyone to respond to the negative possibilities inherent in the sojourn with a song. Beal Obenchain, for one, vows never to be satisfied with either the meaning or hope gained by "holding hands in a circle and singing hymns" (*The Living* 374).

It does occur to Dillard. Her nonfiction and her recent novel are her own response to her awareness of the conditions. In her nonfiction especially, one can see her searching for meaning even as she attempts to make her readers aware of the ambiguous nature of the conditions. Her magic realist essays evince a conviction that meaning is possible and that it is a consequence of the way in which one chooses to see reality. Slemon says that magic realist fiction is essentially a positive, constructive form and this seems no less true of its nonfictional form. In Dillard's hands, the magic realist essay seems to be a form which acknowledges the difficulty of making sense of the puzzling "ontological situations in which we find ourselves" and does so without letting "indeterminacy take over [its non]fictional worlds" (Pavel on modern fiction, 112).

Given how much Dillard has written about literary art and its possibilities, it is almost surprising that when she turned to fiction, she did not write a *Künstlerroman* or a postmodern novel, with art in its content and its form. In *The Living*, only Glee Fishburn attempts to find meaning in art, writing "a three-hundred page narrative poem in which men fought pack ice and polar bears" (*The Living* 384). Instead of overtly depicting her characters finding meaning through art, however, Dillard allows her novel to stand as her response to the conditions. With the artifice of her narrator representing the ideal response to the sojourn, she creates a work which again challenges the reader to see in a different way, to see the conditions and to see them in a particular way.

At the end of *Living by Fiction*, Dillard returns to the question of meaning she has been dancing around throughout the book:

> Do art's complex and balanced relationships among all parts, its purpose, significance, and harmony, exist in nature? Is nature whole, like a completed thought? Is history purposeful? Is the universe of matter significant? (185)

Her answer is "I am sorry; I do not know." This seems like a bit of a cop out after she has been exploring the question for nearly two hundred pages. However, within Dillard's world view, this is the only reasonable answer. It is the only answer in her book of literary theory because these are questions that only art can address:

> Now, in the modern world, in the fallen world, in the world in which neither the old order nor the new science has any answers, human vision must take over as the sole epistemological tool. In these realms, only art can speak. (Foreword xi)

So. Will the conditions of his existence ever allow man to consider himself anything but a sojourner? Is there meaning in the world? Dillard's answer … *Teaching a Stone to Talk, The Living*.

NOTES

Notes to Chapter One

[1] Dillard directly quotes this verse four times: once in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (101), once in "Sojourners" in *Teaching a Stone to Talk* (150), and twice in *The Living* (4, 188). The repetition of this quotation alone suggests the importance of the concept of sojourning to Dillard's work.

[2] It also gives the following obsolete or archaic definitions: "To make a stay; to tarry, delay"; "To lodge; to rest or quarter (horses); to have as a lodger"; "To travel, journey."

[3] On Dillard's use of the Hebrew scriptures, see Goldman's article about her notion of sacrifice in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. In all its forms, "sojourn" occurs seventy-three times in the KJV OT (and just five times in the NT).

[4] Hereafter, the following abbreviations will be used in parenthetical references and in the notes:

AC	*An American Childhood*
BAE	Dillard's introduction to *The Best American Essays 1988*
ECW	*Encounters with Chinese Writers*
HF	*Holy the Firm*
LF	*Living by Fiction*
PTC	*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*
TPW	*Tickets for a Prayer Wheel*
TST	*Teaching a Stone to Talk*
WL	*The Writing Life*

[5] Nietzsche's "formula for greatness in a man": "that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it … but *love* it" (*Ecce Homo* 714).

[6] This comment is quoted by Dunn (17), Felch (1), and McFadden (773).

[7] Dillard wrote her M.A. thesis at Hollins College on Thoreau. Anhorn says that "Dillard makes no mystery of Thoreau's influence upon her, citing him often in [*PTC*]" (142). Dillard strengthened her connections with Thoreau recently, when she married Robert D. Richardson, Jr., whose biography *Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* she called—before marrying Richardson—the "best biography I've ever read in my whole life" (qtd. in Trueheart D3).

[8] Dillard talks about "conditions" most notably in "An Expedition to the Pole": for example, "I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions" (40).

9 Slovic argues that "the visions and realizations which occur on an adult level in [*PTC*] … are mere extensions of more universal childhood experience" (91–92).

10 Dillard also uses the image of the surfacing dolphin to symbolize waking in *AC*: "And still I break up through the skin of awareness a thousand times a day, as dolphins burst through seas, and dive again, and rise, and dive" (250).

11 "Sojourner" first appeared as "Artists of the Beautiful" in *Living Wilderness* (Winter 1974–75), in her column, "Sojourner."

12 The power of death to make us ponder our lives is her subject in her novel, *The Living*, which I will discuss in Chapter Three.

13 In her interview with Hammond, Dillard describes Advent as the time when "The soul empties itself of the world in order to prepare for the incursions of God at Christmas" (32).

14 A similar image of being born from the sea initiates the theme of waking and sojourning in *PTC*: "You remember pressure, and a curved sleep you rested against, soft, like a scallop in its shell. But the air hardens your skin; you stand; you leave the lighted shore to explore some dim headland, and soon you're lost in the leafy interior, intent, remembering nothing" (2).

15 Dillard also told Hammond that "Bivouac" is "the only poem of mine that I still like" (33).

16 *The Dictionary of American Usage* defines "buck and wing" as "a kind of tapdance … performed with wooden or fibre-soled shoes."

17 Meaningfulness seems to provide Dillard with a criterion both for art and good art.

Notes to Chapter Two

18 The pun in the title alludes to the quality or state of human life in light of evolutionary theory: after Darwin, we feel ship-wrecked, devastated.

19 Its title also puns, referring to the be-wildering irony of pain in a world purportedly under God's providential care: "Will someone please explain to Alan McDonald [who has suffered major facial burns twice] in his dignity, to the deer at Providencia in his dignity, what is going on? And mail me the carbon" (66). On Dillard on "dignity," see my discussion of "An Expedition to the Pole" later in this chapter.

20 See, respectively, "Aces and Eights" and "Teaching a Stone to Talk."

21 Douglas Hesse points out that we "seldom encounter unlabeled texts. When we do, we engage a complexly recursive process of hyphothesizing what kind of work it is (or is like) and reading in that light until we need to readjust our hypotheses." His example is E.B. White's "The Flocks We Watch By Night," which is not quite an "essay," though that is what one expects encountering it in a collection of White's essays. Alluding to the same disjunction of contextually-generated expectations I am

referring to in discussing "Jungle Peace" and "In the Jungle," he states that "If one encounters the piece in the *New Yorker*, the inclination to read it as story dominates from the start" ("A Boundary Zone" 88).

22 Zwaan has found that readers who were led to believe that a passage of prose was "literary" read the passage more slowly and retained a "stronger surface structure representation" (that is, they seem to have paid closer attention to stylistic features and surface detail) than readers who were told the passage was "news" (Zwann 139ff). I am claiming that a similar difference in mode of reading might be produced by the different contexts in which the two versions of this piece appears.

23 Dillard drops a paragraph about a nocturnal boat-ride in search of alligators; she adds one describing an American explorer's account of how the region's Indians used to sleep naked and warm themselves with the ninety-degree river water. She adds a comparison of the width of the Napo River to "the Mississippi at Davenport" to give her North American readers a point of reference (*TST* 55); from her description of a guide's having impaled a boa on a stick, she drops the (patronizing?) comment "to please us"; she adds that her party sang "Old MacDonald" in response to the children's hymn, and that the children thought the tourists were out of their minds for all the animal noises (58–59). Finally, the Napo River is "a basin of greenness, and of grace, and, *it would seem* [added], of peace" (59).

24 Joseph Epstein defines the essay as "a piece of writing that is anywhere from three to fifty pages long, *that can be read twice*, that provides some of the pleasures of style…" (400; italics added). I will confess to not having reread "Jungle Peace," even in my role as objective investigator.

25 Mark Johnson's particular notion is that "These patterns emerge as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of our bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions" (29). This comment is particularly interesting in light of Dillard's emphasis on her experience of the conditions, which she often records in terms of movement and sensation.

26 See, for instance, Schank and Abelson, 19: "Some episodes are reminiscent of others. As an economy measure in the storage of episodes, when enough of them are alike they are remembered in terms of a standardized generalized episode which we will call a script."

27 "Life on the Rocks," and its companion piece, "Teaching a Stone to Talk," are themselves the product of two visits to the Galápagos Islands (see *TST* 74).

28 The original version of the story has "rest spiritually" for "rest my mind": the spiritual intention does not work according to plan because Dillard ends up being challenged spiritually by the events related in this narrative.

29 Part of our expectation for a collection such as *TST* must be that the individual pieces are good enough to have made it into print, and that if we find a story, that its destination will be worth our attention, just as we may expect its essays to be artful and thoughtful enough to convince us of their point.

[30] Zeiger draws this category from William Labov's sociolinguistic analysis of black English vernacular (*Language in the Inner City*, Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1972).

[31] In *Living by Fiction*, Dillard expresses admiration for the skill with which Joyce and Bellow, for instance, have hidden their own traces in the text. Stories like "The Dead" are "purified" fictional narration (*LF* 156). Dillard attempts, in *Encounters with Chinese Writers*, to create a similarly purified, comment-less nonfictional narration (see her comment qtd. above). "On a Hill" is not very pure when compared to "The Dead" or "Leaving the Yellow House"; but if it is thought of as a narrative essay, it seems fairly "pure"—in spite of the narrator's presence—because it lacks an explication of the point or an overt conclusion.

[32] In her introduction to *BAE* (xvii), Dillard says that "The essayist ... can make sense of [actual things] analytically or artistically. In either case he renders the real world coherent and meaningful, even if only bits of it, and even if that coherence and meaning reside only inside small texts."

[33] If this story was encountered in another context, merely knowing that Dillard wrote it and associating her with the *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (she refers to Tinker Creek in "On a Hill") might be enough to engage the competing sets of expectations.

[34] In "Why I Live Where I Live," Dillard describes herself as a "social animal, alive in a gang, like a walrus, or a howler monkey, or a bee.... I cannot imagine thinking, [*sub specie aeternitatis*,] 'I wish I'd spent more time alone" (92). This sociability is not always evident in her nonfiction: Eudora Welty accused her, for instance, of being the only person in *Pilgrim*: "Annie Dillard is the only person in her book, substantially the only one in her world; I recall no outside speech coming to break the long soliloquy of the author" (5). In a review of *TST*, Ronda says that "The sometimes intense individualism of the earlier books is complemented [in *TST*] by the presence of other people, so that a kind of tension is created between personal vision and collective insight" (1064).

[35] This seems to illustrate the kind of "approach-avoidance conflict" which Dillard claims, in "Living Like Weasels," did *not* apply to her encounter with the weasel. In that startling meeting, her mind locks with the weasel's, she says, for sixty seconds. There is no such direct communication in her encounter with the boy; any insight she gains into the boy's mind is indirect, and the term "approach-avoidance conflict" does seem to fit their interaction. The mare may also proleptically represent the boy's mother, whose shyness and sense of obligation have shaped her son's manner.

[36] The version of this story published in *Harper's* in 1975 makes this symbol more explicit: "At sunset I crossed Tinker Creek on the top plank of the steer fence, and then, *instead of ducking under the barbed-wire fence* by the horse run, I followed the wire...up the big grassy hill. I'd never been there before, *on that side of the fence*" (22; passages in italics are those dropped from the later version). Though she removes these explicit comments, Dillard makes the barrier more vivid in the later

version by changing several references to "the fence" to "the barbed-wire" or "barbed-wire fence."

37 Neither of these comments about the screen door is found in the *Harper's* version of the story. The first is a simple insertion. The second formerly read "While I waited on the front step,..." which is less suggestive of barrier (23).

38 George Bennard (1913; copyright 1941, Rodeheaver).

39 Genesis 3:15 is read typologically as a messianic prophecy fulfilled by Christ's defeat of death in dying and also yet to be fulfilled by Christ's final victory over Satan in the second coming: the woman's seed (Christ) "shall bruise thy [the serpent's] head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (KJV). Dillard may also have in mind the assurance by the writer of Romans to the believers in Rome: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Romans 16:20, KJV; the translator's note suggests "tread" as an alternative translation for "bruise").

40 This story provides a few hints that it can be taken as an Epiphany. The events occur in January, the foal is six days old (perhaps hinting at 6 January). Dillard returns frequently to the incarnation as a symbol, so the whole Christmas season, from Advent to Epiphany is important to her. In *The Living*, for instance, Clare's savior comes into his life on Christmas Eve, and Clare recognizes the significance of this visitation twelve days later on Epiphany (see Chapter Three). I discuss Dillard's use of the incarnation, providing more examples from Dillard's work, as it relates to another essay from *TST*, "God in the Doorway," below.

41 There are also some fine examples of the fantastic in *Holy the Firm*, where Dillard often creates fantastic images which she never permits to resolve into recognizable, realistic detail. In the scene in which her cat Small drags "in a god, scorched," we think perhaps it is a bird, for it is a small, singing, winged creature, but Dillard never returns the image to "reality" (27). See especially the opening description of the days as gods (11–13), and the scene in which she apparently witnesses Christ's baptism (66f). While the effect is much the same as in *TST*'s magic realist essays, because the prose in *HF* is generally heightened and intense and the imagery poetic, the contrast between the realism and the fantastic is not as startling as in the more typically essay-like pieces in *TST*. The recent piece, "Ship in a Bottle," also uses a startling juxtaposition of essay-like realism (again, personal detail about Dillard; the name of a book she was reading, for instance) with the fantastic (she sees little men on an ice-bound ship inside the bottle, and later finds a tiny tube with two sheets of hand-written paper describing the use of bottled "visibility" to see through fog).

42 Slemon points out that other critics understand magic realism as working by interweaving or synthesizing the magic and the real into a seamless, unproblematic whole (23n10).

43 "To be quite precise, we must say that a writer's language does not signify things as they are—because none of us knows things as they are; instead, a writer's language does an airtight job of signifying his *perceptions* of things as they are" (*LF* 70).

44 Clark points out that the language of the opening scene of *Holy the Firm*, in which Dillard describes waking to the day as a god, prohibits the reader from deciding which details form the tenor and which the vehicle of the imagery (117–18).

45 Though Christianity in some ways (or in some eyes) deals exclusively with the fantastic, it has its own form of magic realism, namely, apocalypse.

46 Acknowledging the potentially cataclysmic effects of the incarnation for the believer, Dillard has said, "If there is a God, it is not an insignificant fact, but something that requires a radical rethinking of every little thing. Your knowledge of God can't be considered as one fact among many. You have to bring all the other facts into line with the fact of God" (qtd. in Fitzgerald 80).

47 This image comes from "Total Eclipse," where Dillard compares the inability of language to "cover the breadth and simultaneity of internal experience" to the inability of a greeting card representation of the incarnation to convey the power and significance of the event.

48 Scheick's word for Dillard's technique of collapsing images (58).

49 He claims that this technique "represents a new direction" for Dillard; in light of my discussion above of two other magic realist essays in *TST*, "Expedition" does not seem a departure, but rather Dillard's most extended implementation of a technique she uses elsewhere (in *Holy the Firm* and even *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*).

50 According to most anthologies, at least. Those that do not offer a section of "narrative essays" usually include supplementary indexes of their essays listing them by subgenre. (See, for instance, Jackel and Legris, and Scholes, Klaus and Silverman.) Douglas Hesse is the critic to expend the most theoretical effort on the narrative essay recently. See, for instance, his "Stories in Essays," "A Boundary Zone," and his doctoral dissertation, "The Story in the Essay."

51 The essay's second section has just three subsections, respectively, "The Land," "The People" and "Assorted Wildlife." The third section's nine subsections alternate regularly between "The Land" and "The Technology."

52 In the essay, Gass claims, "The apparatus of the scholar is generally kept hid; frequently quotations are not even identified (we *both* know who said *that*, and anyway its origin doesn't matter" (25).

53 The impression is that these comments are addressed, as if aloud, to an audience. This is one of the ways that an essay with its nonfictional narration differs from a short story, in which the reader rarely gets a sense that the author is speaking directly to him. Elbow deals with the quality of voice in the essay, suggesting that essays in particular create a sense of presence, of the essayist "coming to the reader, of doing the work for the reader, and of producing genuine and direct contact with the reader" (233). Matiko's dissertation on Dillard and Lewis Thomas deals with these authors' techniques for creating an implied audience.

54 Dillard is punning on Matthew 13:45–46: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one *pearl of great*

price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (KJV). The pun locates this pole and the Absolute a bit more precisely in the spiritual domain as the kingdom of heaven.

55 Part of the irony of the comparison is that while the pole of relative inaccessibility is an imaginary point, it is the object of real, life-and-death efforts, while the Absolute, real in Dillard's eyes, is object of only token, ignoble efforts. This, for Dillard, is one aspect of contemporary society's blindness to "the conditions."

56 From Mark Johnson's definition, in an "experiential sense," of metaphor.

57 McFadden calls it in passing "a dreadful folk Mass" (775); she misses the point I think. Dillard dislikes the "dread hootenanny," but she admits that the absurdity of the mass seems a feature of all human God-directed efforts.

58 "Now" is used twice more in the same way in the immediate context: the magically real bent of a section is tilted back toward realism with this reorienting spatio-temporal deixis.

59 McFadden comments that "It is Dillard's genius that she can often explain her vision to the uninitiated,… [doing this] like any visionary, in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone" (774). While the tone remains that of nonfictional narration here, it hides the complexity of the technique Dillard is using to communicate her vision.

60 His example is *The Invention of the World* by Jack Hodgins.

61 Though the events are fantastic, Dillard maintains the internal consistency of the world. For instance, the narrator tosses her shoes in the offering and later has bare feet. She gives up her watch and later speaks of time generally, as one might if one shed the habit of living hours instead of a life: "Months have passed; years have passed" (38).

62 I can personally vouch for the defamiliarizing power of this essay. This morning at St. Paul's, after an infant baptism complete with the priest's giving out wrong page numbers, a CamCorder and several rambunctious godcousins, we inexplicably applauded. As we have done before. After reading "Expedition," I couldn't bring myself to clap: who is to be congratulated here? The priest for not spilling, the parents for getting the child there with unsoiled gown (and white, appropriate shoes), God?

Most of this particular service seemed unable to become anything more than human effort in the merely human domain. In an attempt to re-create the exultant mood of the crowd at Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and to invoke the real presence of Jesus, we were instructed by the cheer-leading priest to shout out our favorite name for Jesus: "Lord," "Emmanuel," "King of Kings," etc. She then led us through a responsory in which we were to yell these names, which we did when instructed and fairly enthusiastically. The first time anyway. For we repeated the whole procedure, the first time through having been a "practice." I wondered, were we not welcoming Jesus into our presence the first time, with our shouts of praise and singing? How was that go-through less really effective in the spiritual realm than the second, in which the level of participation was noticeably milder (we were only able to repress our yelling-in-church taboo for so long)? Are practices at doing something real in the spiritual domain not themselves valid acts in that realm? I have to hope so, for I am a practicing believer only.

[63] The chapter there called "Northing" seems particularly relevant to the physical/spiritual connection in "Expedition": "These northings drew me, present northings, past northings, the thought of northings. In the literature of arctic exploration, the talk is of northing.... Shall I go northing? My legs are long" (*PTC* 249).

[64] While science "taught people to measure and add," Christianity taught us "to pray to an *absent* God" (*LF* 136; italics added).

[65] Sandra Humble Johnson, for one, says that the composition of "Expedition" "is surrealistic and object-laden, very similar to Bartleme's short story "The Balloon" or a Dali painting. With this tendency toward surrealism it becomes exceedingly artificial on the surface" (16).

[66] Gass says, "The essayist speaks one mind truly, but that is far from speaking the truth; and this lack of fanaticism, this geniality in the thinker, this sense of the social proprieties involved ... are evidence of how fully aware the author is of the proper etiquette for meeting minds. Good manners ... signify, here, equality and openness, a security which comes to a mind which has been released from dogmatism. If there is too much earnestness, too great a need to persuade, a want of correct convictions in the reader is implied, and therefore an absence of community" (23–24).

Notes to Chapter Three

[67] See "The Living" which Dillard has described as "more important than some other writing I've done" (Hammond 38). The subject of the short story, Beal's threat to kill Clare and Clare's response, forms the central conflict of the novel. The novel sets these events within the story of the growing settlements on Bellingham Bay. Clare and Beal acquire families, childhoods and manifold connections with the people and events of the history of the region.

[68] Most of my "critical" sources are reviewers; at this early stage of the novel's career, there is little else.

[69] Fee says that "Chinook Jargon" derived half its vocabulary from Chinook and Nootka, and the other half from French and English. She estimates that the language had about 700 words and was spoken by as many as 100 000 people west of the Rocky Mountains late in the nineteenth century; *The Kamloops Wawa* was published in Chinook from 1891 to 1904 (214).

70 The aptness of the image of felling a tree is particularly striking when compared with the image in the corresponding passage in "The Living" (1978), which is not quite as appropriate to the activities of the place and time evoked in the novel: "If a man believes he will plant marigolds…" (the short story is, however, set in 1906, when Whatcom has reached a level of civilization to which this image might be appropriate).

71 Note the hook at the end of the long, rhythmic sentence, and especially the ideas it introduces surprisingly, temporality and death.

72 Some of the surprise here derives from our unwillingness to believe that the narrator would so casually mention the death of a character she has spent considerable time and space developing.

73 Another example of this plain-style handling of emotional moments is the unsentimental evocation of Clare's reunion with his wife June after several weeks apart: "Her eyes found Clare's at once, and their glances' touch unstrung both. They made a blind path through the crowd to each other, and Clare took her in his arms" (270). This image is reminiscent of Dillard's example in *Living by Fiction* of the ability of plain prose to handle emotional scenes: "The central love scene of Powell's twelve-volume *A Dance to the Music of Time* ends unforgettably: 'I took her in my arms'" (120). *Living by Fiction*, in which she argues the case for the kind of fiction she considers "art," seems to become a kind of handbook for Dillard as she writes her novel, in which she will try to satisfy her own criteria. The book also becomes something of a guidebook to the novel, suggesting, as in this discussion of her plain prose style, what kind of effect she is trying to achieve. The critical questions, then, are Does she meet her own standards? and Are those standards good, useful, or at least defensible ones?

74 The equivalent passage in "The Living" does not contain this description of the crabs on the shark. This could be merely a case of the greater space for detail available in a novel. It also suggest that the crabs grow into a more significant symbol in the novel.

75 Down becomes the direction of death in the novel. Ada's son, Charley, goes down off the wagon into a rut and is run over (8); Rooney and George die in the well; Eustace slips down through the logjam to drown and Hugh sees "his father's mild face, in profile, going down surprised behind a patch of grass like a muskrat" (105); the Sharps drown, and in John Ireland's imagination, they go "down stiff and upright in their filled gum boots and soaked skirts" (60); Hugh carries Ada's second husband's body home and its weight "seemed to drive toward the ground, as if the man were diving in his socks" (321); as a doctor, Hugh will "stand on two feet holding on to people and fighting with the ground's tug for their bodies" (321); Beal quotes, gloating about his power over Clare, from Exodus "The depths have covered them; they sank into the bottom as a stone" and then himself goes down off the trestle to his death. The many downward deaths, focused by Clare's simple image of death as going down with our last steps, reinforce the presence of death as the

fictional world's boundary condition. (In two other places, Dillard uses this same image of bird tracks on a beach ending with the bird going up, also commenting that man goes down. See "Bivouac," *TPW* 73 and "Life on the Rocks," *TST* 115.)

[76] The innocence of children and the process of waking they undergo as they mature are especially important to Dillard. In "To Fashion a Text" Dillard describes a picture which symbolizes for her this childish innocent awareness of life: it is a photograph "of a little Amazonian boy whose face is sticking out of a waterfall or a rapids. White water is pounding all around his head, in a kind of wreath, but his face is absolutely still, looking up, and his black eyes are open dreamily on the distance. That little boy is completely alive; he's letting the mystery of existence beat on him. He's having his childhood, and I think he knows it" (58). In *The Living*, Ada speaks what seem to be Dillard's thoughts on children. She thinks, "Of all God's works, little girls were the superior article: broadest in sympathy, deepest in wisdom, and purest in impulse" (190). They are innocent, yet have a kind of awareness of life: "When she laughed her milk teeth showed, and a mocking awareness shone in her eyes so Ada did not know where on her face to look that would not break her own heart or perplex her."

[77] This is the only mention of the life of sensation in *The Living*; the corresponding passage in "The Living" (1978) is identical (but for the words, "or sharpers" [48]).

[78] I am drawing on Taylor's descriptions of Kierkegaard's "stages on life's way" in my analysis of Dillard's three modes of life. All references to Taylor in this chapter are to *Journeys to Selfhood.*

[79] Clare also senses nature speaking but incomprehensibly during his similar period of uncertainty after Beal's threat: "the tide made a small approaching noise like gibberish" (219).

[80] When he finally does become aware of the conditions, the "worldly things in their multiplicity" into which he has poured his energy slide "away disintegrating *like shooting stars*" (198), complementing the previous cosmological imagery.

[81] "Colored fog" is referred to twice in the outline for "The Living," on the left-hand third of the page, which is headed "senses / hit them, all 5"; one of these reads: "senses—a colored fog" (see Appendix).

[82] Note the repetitive construction, which draws extra attention to the new reality that Clare begins to see.

[83] The list is slightly different in "The Living," most notably adding "an embodiment of pure mind" (48).

[84] Though this epithet is dropped in *The Living*, it describes Beal's character equally well in the novel and short story. Note especially the possible association of the unusual name "Beal" with "baal," a false or pagan god in OT usage.

[85] This again suggests the Beal / baal connection.

[86] This last image anticipates one of Beal's first attempts to gain power over himself and reality, strangling a calf with baling twine. Though Beal and John's attempts to

generate meaning differ greatly in magnitude, both are efforts to impose ordering principles onto the unruly conditions each finds himself in.

87 The narrator compares John and Beal when she says that "Like Obenchain, [John] preferred seeing to being seen" (234). The grounds for comparison seem odd, since both are later described as "unseeing"; however, both John and Beal think that their vision is clear when they make the conclusions to which the life of the mind leads them. John's "first and clearest view" is that "life in time is a freezing bivouac, and the world's people forever cruel" (367). See above for Beal's clear vision. The use of the word "apostatized" to describe the decisions of each is another ground for comparison. John "apostatizes" twice: first he rescinds his "first and clearest view" when he thinks that socialism can effect change. Then he gives up on this attempt to re-order reality with the expulsion of the "Celestials": "he apostatized again" (367). Beal refuses to apostatize and accept the value and meaning found in society (374). Both are stuck in the life of the mind in their blindness.

88 In the outline to the short story, Dillard writes:

Xmas? incarnation
into wld of senses
Obenchain a X, saving him (see Appendix)

On the significance of the incarnation for Dillard, see chapter 2.

89 This is another cosmological image of sojourning, similar to Ada and John's impressions of themselves under the heavens, quoted above.

90 Dillard has this to say on concealing the point in fiction: "If you really have 'something to say' in literary fiction, then, you will have to interest a critic in your work, or somehow interest your readers in analyzing its structure—or else what you 'have to say' will go unheard.... [I]n order to write fiction that anybody might want to read, [intellectual authors] must painstakingly conceal what is to them its very point.... In order to make a world in which their ideas might be discovered, writers must conceal them. In the process of fleshing out a thought, they brick it in. The more subtle they are as artists,... the more completely their structures will vanish into the work, and the more grouchy they will become the more readers tell them what lovely, solid bricks they make" (*Living by Fiction* 156).

91 The following note, appearing in the outline to "The Living," bears noting in relation to the imagery of time in this scene:

"The present time is the path which I have
opened." — Egyptian book of the dead (see Appendix)

92 Note the homodiegetic imagery, referring back to Clare's teaching Eustace to burn down trees.

93 This effect is working very early in the novel. When Dillard describes Rooney's falling of a tree that gets "hung up dangerously," I half-expected Rooney to die in an accident. He does not die here, but just my anticipating death already (on page 17)

shows how quickly Dillard has managed to draw me into the fictional world and its rugged boundary conditions.

WORKS CITED

Adams, Phoebe-Lou. Rev. of *The Living*. *Atlantic Monthly* 269 (June 1992): 128.

Albin, C. D. "What the Living Know in Bellingham Bay." Rev. of *The Living*. *The Christian Century* 109 (7 Oct. 1992): 871–73.

Ames, Katrine. Rev. of *The Living*. *Newsweek* 119 (8 June 1992): 57.

Anderson, Chris. "Hearsay Evidence and Second-Class Citizenship." *College English* 50.3 (1988): 300–08.

---, ed. *Literary Nonfiction: Theory, Criticism, Pedagogy*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1989.

Anhorn, Judy Schaaf. "Lines of Sight: Annie Dillard's 'Purified Nonfiction Narration.'" *Cross-Cultural Studies: American, Canadian, and European Literature: 1945–1985*. Ed. Mirko Jurak. Ljubljana: Filozofska Fakulteta, 1988.

Ayto, John. *Dictionary of Word Origins*. New York: Arcade, 1990.

Baldick, Chris. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.

Becker, John E. "Science and the Sacred: From Walden to Tinker Creek." *Thought* 62 (1987): 400–413.

Clark, Suzanne. "Annie Dillard: The Woman in Nature and the Subject of Nonfiction." Anderson 107–124.

The Dictionary of American Usage. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1940.

Dillard, Annie. *An American Childhood*. New York: Harper and Row, 1987.

---. "Artists of the Beautiful." *The Living Wilderness* 38 (Dec. 1974): 62–63.

---, ed. and intro. *Best American Essays, 1988*. New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988.

---. *Encounters with Chinese Writers*. Middleton, CN: Wesleyan UP, 1984.

---. Foreword. *Moments of Light*. By Fred Chappell. Newport Beach, CA: New South, 1980. ix–xvii.

---. "Four Bits." *Ploughshares* 10.2–3: 69–73.

---. *Holy the Firm*. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

---. "Jungle Peace." *Holiday* 56 (Sept. 1975): 24–27.

---. "The Living." *Harper's* 257 (Nov. 1978): 45–64.

---. *The Living*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.

---. *Living by Fiction*. New York: Harper and Row, 1982.

---. "On a Hill Far Away." *Harper's* 251 (Oct. 1975): 22–24.

---. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974.

---. "The Purification of Poetry: Right Out of the Ballpark." *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* 11.2 (1983): 287–301.

---. "Ship in a Bottle." *Harper's* 279 (Sept. 1989): 68–71.

---. "Singing With the Fundamentalists." *Yale Review* 74.2 (Dec. 1985): 312–20.

---. *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters*. New York: Harper and Row, 1983.

---. *Tickets for a Prayer Wheel*. 1974. New York: Harper and Row, 1988.

---. "To Fashion a Text." Ed. William Zinsser. *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Boston: Houghton, 1987. 55–76.

---. "Why I Live Where I Live." *Esquire* 101 (Mar. 1984): 90–92.

---. "Winter Melons." Rev. of *Notes from a Bottle Found on the Beach at Carmel* and *Points for a Compass Rose*. By Evan S. Connell, Jr. *Harper's* 248 (Jan. 1974): 87–90.

---. *The Writing Life*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989.

Dunn, Robert Paul. "The Artist as Nun: Theme, Tone and Vision in the Writings of Annie Dillard." *Studia Mystica* 1.iv (1978): 17–31.

Elbow, Peter. "The Pleasures of Voice: Explorations in the Prose of Gretel Ehrlich and Richard Selzer." Anderson 211–34.

Epstein, Joseph. "Piece Work: Writing the Essay." *Plausible Prejudices*. New York: Norton, 1985. 379–411.

Fee, Margery. "Chinook Jargon." McArthur 214.

Felch, Susan M. "Annie Dillard: Modern Physics in a Contemporary Mystic." *Mosaic* 22.2 (1989): 1–14.

Fitzgerald, Karen. "The Good Books: Writer's Choices." *Ms* (Dec. 1985): 80–81.

Gass, William H. "Emerson and the Essay." *Habitations of the Word*. New York: Simon, 1985. 9–49.

Gloss, Molly. "By the Shores of Puget Sound." Rev. of *The Living*. *Book World (Washington Post)* 22 (3 May 1992): 1+.

Hammond, Karla M. "Drawing the Curtains: An Interview with Annie Dillard." *Bennington Review* 10 (Apr. 1981): 30–38.

Hesse, Douglas. "A Boundary-Zone: First-Person Short Stories and Narrative Essays." Eds. Susan Lohafer and Jo Ellyn Clarey. *Short Story Theory at a Crossroads*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989. 85–105.

---. "Stories in Essays, Essays as Stories." Anderson 176–196.

---. "The Story in the Essay." *Dissertation Abstracts International* 47.8 (Feb. 1987): 3024A.

Jackel, David, and Maurice R. Legris, eds. *Essential Essays: Canadian, American and British*. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1990.

Johnson, Mark. *The Body in the Mind: the Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.

Johnson, Sandra Humble. *Literary Epiphany in the Work of Annie Dillard.* Diss. Bowling Green State University. 1989. Recently published as *The Space Between: Literary Epiphany in the Work of Annie Dillard.* Kent: Kent State UP, 1992.

Keller, Joseph. "The Function of Paradox in Mystical Discourse." *Studia Mystica* 6.3 (1983): 3–19.

Keneally, Thomas. "Beneath the Wheels of Progress." Rev. of *The Living. New York Times Book Review* (3 May 1992): 9.

Kingsolver, Barbara. "Whipsawed in Washington." Rev. of *The Living. The Nation* 254 (25 May 1992): 692–94.

Kort, Wesley A. *Story, Text, and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narratives.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1988.

Lavery, David L. "Noticer: The Visionary Art of Annie Dillard." *Massachussets Review* 21 (1980): 255–70.

Lucas, Nancy. "Annie Dillard." *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook: 1980.* Eds. Karen L. Root, Jean W. Ross, and Richard Ziegfeld. Detroit: Bruccoli Clark, 1981. 184–89.

Maddocks, Melvin. "Terror and Celebration." Rev. of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. Time* (Canadian edition) (18 Mar. 1974): 78.

Mathews, Laura. "Annie Dillard's Great Adventure." Rev. of *The Living. Glamor* (May 1992): 181.

Matiko, Beverly. *Fictionalizing the Audience in Literary Nonfiction: A Study of the Essays of Annie Dillard and Lewis Thomas.* Diss. Edmonton, University of Alberta. Fall 1991.

McArthur, Tom, ed. *The Oxford Companion to the English Language.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992.

McConahay, Mary Davidson. "'Into the Bladelike Arms of God': The Quest for Meaning Through Symbolic Language in Thoreau and Annie Dillard." *Denver Quarterly* 20.2 (1985): 103–116.

McCullough, Donald W. "The Boundaries of the Living." Rev. of *The Living*. *Christianity Today* 36 (14 Sept. 1992): 46.

McFadden, Margaret. "Review of *Teaching a Stone to Talk*." *Magill's Literary Annual 1983*. Ed. Frank N. Magill. Pasadena: Salem P, 1983. 773–777.

McFadden-Gerber, Margaret. "Review of *An American Childhood*." Ed. Frank N. Magill. *Magill's Literary Annual 1988*. Pasadena: Salem P, 1988. 25–30.

McIlroy, Gary. "*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and the Social Legacy of *Walden*." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 85.2 (1986): 111–122.

---. "*Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and the Burden of Science." *American Literature* 59.1 (1987): 71–84.

---. "'The Sparer Climate for Which I Longed': *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and the Spiritual Imperatives of Fall." *The Thoreau Quarterly* 16.3–4 (1984): 156–161.

---. "Transcendental Prey: Stalking the Loon and the Coot." *Thoreau Society Bulletin* 176 (June 1986): 5–6.

Messer, Richard. "The Spiritual Quest in Two Works by Annie Dillard." *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 9.3–4 (1988): 321–330.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*. Trans. and ed. with commentaries, Walter Kaufman. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. New York: Modern Library, 1968. 657–791.

The Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1989.

Pavel, Thomas G. *Fictional Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard U P, 1986.

Peterson, E. H. "Annie Dillard: With Her Eyes Open." *Theology Today* 43 (1986): 178–91.

Rev. of *The Living*. *Kirkus Reviews* 60 (1 Feb. 1992): 129–30.

Rev. of *The Living*. *New Yorker* 68 (6 July 1992): 80.

Rev. of *The Living*. *Publisher's Weekly* 239 (24 Feb. 1992): 41.

Ronda, Bruce A. "Annie Dillard's Fictions to Live By." *The Christian Century* 101.35 (14 Nov. 1984): 1062–66.

Ross-Bryant, Lynn. "The Silence of Nature." *Religion and Literature* 22.1 (1990): 79–94.

Rubin, Merle. "Death Comes to the Northwest Coast." Rev. of *The Living*. *Wall Street Journal* 219 (4 May 1992): A12.

Schank, Roger C., and Robert P. Abelson. *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1977.

Scheick, William J. "Annie Dillard: Narrative Fringe." Eds. Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick. *Contemporary American Women Writers: Narrative Strategies*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1985. 51–67.

Scholes, Robert, and Robert Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: Oxford UP, 1966.

---, Carl H. Klaus, and Michael Silverman, eds. "Elements of the Essay." *Elements of Literature: Essay, Fiction, Poetry, Drama, Film*. New York: Oxford UP, 1978.

Slemon, Stephen. "Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse." *Canadian Literature* 116 (1988): 9–24.

Slovic, Scott. *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing: Henry Thoreau, Annie Dillard, Edward Abbey, Wendell Berry, Barry Lopez*. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1992.

Smith, Linda L. *Annie Dillard*. Twayne's United States Authors Series 588. New York: Twayne, 1991.

Sweeney, Louise. "Saga of Northwest Pioneers." Rev. of *The Living*. *Christian Science Monitor* 84 (22 May 1992): 13.

Taylor, Mark C. *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984.

---. *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1980.

Trueheart, Charles. “Annie Dillard: Pilgrim’s Progress.” *The Washington Post.* 28 Oct. 1987, D: 1–3.

Wales, Katie. “Style.” McArthur 992–94.

Weber, Katharine. “*PW* Interviews: Annie Dillard.” *Publisher’s Weekly* 236 (1 Sept. 1989): 67–8.

Webster’s Ninth Collegiate Dictionary. Markham, ON: Thomas Allen, 1985.

Welty, Eudora. Rev. of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. New York Times Book Reviews* (24 Mar. 1974): 4–5.

Wymard, E. B. “New Existential Voice.” *Commonweal* 102 (24 Oct. 1975): 495–96.

Yancey, Phillip. “A Face Aflame: Interview with Annie Dillard.” *Christianity Today* 22 (5 May 1978): 958–63.

Zeiger, William. “The Personal Essay and Egalitarian Rhetoric.” Anderson 235–44.

Zwann, Rolf A. “Some Parameters of Literary and News Comprehension: Effects of Discourse-Type Perspective On Reading Rate and Surface Structure Representation.” *Poetics* 20 (1991): 139–56.

Appendix: Outline for "The Living"

[This page contained a reproduction of an autograph
outline for Dillard's short story]

REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Reproduced from Nancy Lucas, "Annie Dillard" in *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook: 1980*. Eds. Karen L. Root, Jean W. Ross, and Richard Ziegfeld (Detroit: Bruccoli Clark, 1981) 188.